Commentary
June 1996

The Deniable Darwin
David Berlinski

Russia's Past, Russia's Future
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Commentary
June 1996

Letters from Readers

Mothers at Home

To the Editor:

As a fan of David Gelernter and a working mother of small children, I read his article, "Why Mothers Should Stay Home" [February], with interest. In my view, it suffers from a confusion endemic to many conservatives who attempt to deal with the trend of mothers entering the workforce. He cannot seem to decide whether the problem is that mothers are being forced to go out to work when they would rather be home, or that mothers who would really like to work are no longer socially constrained from doing so.

Needless to say, the implications for social policy of the choice between these views are quite different. If the principal problem is that rampant materialism and external social pressures have forced mothers to ignore their own "true" desires, then by all means let us work to combat the pressures and attitudes that keep women from their children. With respect to these forces, however, not all women are alike. Less affluent women often work out of real need. As for more affluent and educated mothers, as far as I can tell, a remarkable number succeed in defying the supposedly crushing "social pressures," and choose to stay home and work part-time. I think Mr. Gelernter greatly exaggerates this aspect of the problem.

But what of mothers who have looked the choices straight in the eye and decided to work? Mr. Gelernter avoids confronting the unpleasant fact that a significant number of women—especially women with interesting and remunerative jobs, like his colleagues—simply do not want to be home with their children. Child care is boring, tedious, and lonely. Being financially dependent on a spouse is irksome and humiliating. Professional life offers an outlet for talents and the promise of prestige. Some women harbor such feelings, just as men often do. The main difference is that, in men, these feelings are never questioned (and never need be expressed); in women, they are regarded as selfish and antisocial.

If Mr. Gelernter thinks that women should simply put aside their feelings and opt for self-sacrifice and adherence to duty for the greater social good, then he should come out and say so in plain English instead of beating around the bush. There is much to be said for duty and self-sacrifice. We definitely could use more of these qualities. But that raises the question of why the call for self-abnegation goes out to women only. If the measure of adult responsibility is what children want and what could benefit them, then I daresay Mr. Gelernter's article should have been called "Why Fathers Should Stay Home." Given the choice, many children would opt for the full-time ministrations of their dads, and would surely benefit enormously from undivided male attention. (I know which parent my children would choose!) And they could well have it, since many women are fully capable of supporting a family at a level Mr. Gelernter justifiably would find adequate.

The reason men don't devote themselves to the full-time care of their children, of course, is the same reason many women don't: they don't want to! But why should this matter? After all, duty and restraint exist to curb individual preferences. Vague talk about how women have a "natural inclination" for child care, and will somehow be better at it for that, is unconvincing. How can we tell a woman she has a natural inclination when she does not feel it and is not prepared to act on it? In any event, a man who would rather be elsewhere can do just as good a job taking care of children as a

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woman who feels the same way. I have seen it done.

In the end, Mr. Gelernter cannot make his case without confronting the compelling question at the heart of feminism: why must women sacrifice everything for family and society, when men need not? I am afraid that he fails to provide a satisfactory answer.

AMY L. WAX
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

As a mental-health professional who has maintained a career while raising a son I was especially interested in but ultimately troubled by David Gelernter's article. . . .

Mr. Gelernter gives short shrift to the profound economic anxieties most families confront in the current climate. A recent Marist Institute poll revealed that many Americans have very real concerns that one wage earner might lose a job and that one income would be insufficient to support a family. Framing the issue in terms of working to provide luxuries, as Mr. Gelernter does, trivializes a grave national problem.

Secondly, he fails to discuss both the absence of support in our culture for parenting and the critical role of fathers in child-rearing. Traditional models of family theory relegated child-rearing to an intense mother-child relationship in the first five years of life. We now recognize the family as a system and the critical role of parental teamwork in giving our children the building blocks to become competent, autonomous individuals.

An absence of quality day care; the prevailing tendency to rely on the working mother rather than the father should a child have a special need; and the increased responsibility for aging parents, again a task that often falls to women, are all strains that have an impact on child-rearing. A climate that would enable men and women to work altered hours in those vital early years of childhood without trashing career development would provide cultural support for quality child-rearing; this would mean that parents could leave work for that school play without guilt, take the child to the dentist, stay home for the occasional fever, or bring children to the work site gracefully.

As a department head in a large health-care setting, (director of social work at New York Hospital's Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic), I have helped my staff to parent without guilt, advocated generous leave despite the fiscal climate, welcomed the presence of children at work, and encouraged my male staff to be as involved in these issues as the women.

SUE MATORIN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . David Gelernter's article certainly demands a response. I think my qualifications in this area are superior to his: I am a member of the generation (born 1943) that grew up with the expectation that mothers would stay home with their children. I did stay home with my children for several years and I then clawed my way out of the house and the depression I experienced there. For many of us, full-time mothering was beyond endurance. Have you tried it, Mr. Gelernter: tried having your day limited to wiping Cheerios off the floor and . . . wiping off your children's bottoms and tops, with nary an opportunity to talk in complete sentences? Remember the magazine articles in the 1950's about mothers who were closet alcoholics? Remember how many mothers were prescribed Valium by their (male) doctors to enable them to keep putting one foot in front of the other (to go to the laundry or the supermarket, not to go to work)? I do.

How disingenuous of Mr. Gelernter to suggest that mothers "take over central roles in running schools and local[!] government." Full-time mothers have historically been viewed as addlepated ditzes. Those who appoint, hire, and elect never have and never will value the skills gained in raising children and running a home. The kitchen is not the pool from which "qualified" individuals are sought. I well remember the repeated refrain of men in power, rationalizing their failure to hire or appoint women (and minorities, by the way), "Well, there just aren't any who are qualified." And also, by the way, who is going to care for the children while their mothers are running schools and local government? . . .

If you want some glib explanations for the condition of modern American children, try these: typical work weeks of 45 to 60 hours due to downsizing, high unemployment (making those who do have jobs afraid to complain and unable to relocate), and the compulsive work-ethic of professionals; the level of idiocy in television programs and movies, with which children's lives are super-saturated; the dumbing down of the American classroom; the erosion of basic standards of behavior and manners; and the disintegration of marriages.

Children deserve to spend time with two parents—and they also need quality day care, schools that educate, food on the table, and decent housing. I do not know how old you are, Mr. Gelernter, or what your family situation is, . . . but let me make a suggestion: throw a burp-rag over your shoulder; spend a good half-hour getting the kids into their snowsuits, take the snowsuits off again because they decided they have to go to the bathroom, put the snowsuits back on, get them into their car seats, go to the supermarket; come home and unload kids and groceries from the car; get the kids out of their snowsuits, put the groceries away, feed the kids lunch, start making supper—and give me a call in your spare time, so I can see if you are still able to talk in complete sentences.

SUSAN E. IRELAND
Cambridge, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . To conclude, as David Gelernter does, that children are being damaged by the withdrawal of their mothers' attention is logical if one accepts the necessity of the traditional roles of mother and father and child. According to traditional wisdom, anticipating and meeting the needs of children is a full-time job which only devoted, loving mothers can carry out, for no one else will be able to provide the regular, consistent, and incessant attention children must have. If we accept this and believe that little else has changed in the last few years than the exodus of mothers from the home and into the work-

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place, then the idea that mothers should return home is natural and inevitable. It is even more attractive as we castigate our society for its materialism and self-centeredness—in this view, encouraging, nay, demanding that mothers work is simply the last knot in a string of selfish acts.

In his book, *Greater Expectations*, which Mr. Gelernter cites, William Damon argues that much more has changed in the past few decades than simply the movement of women into the workforce. Our expectations of children and the role they play in the family have shifted. Children are no longer viewed as integral members of the family, capable of contributing to its welfare and responsible for adding to the society at large, but are now the center of family life in an unhealthy way—children are seen as frail creatures of whom little can or should be expected. Once seedlings to be watered by concerned gardeners, they are now hothouse plants which wither without continual supervision. Good parenting has become equated with indulgence, so that in moving away from the thoughtlessness of an authoritarian mode which expects children arbitrarily to do what parents say because the adults are adults, we have adopted a maladaptive method which asserts that parents, and indeed all adults, should do what children say because children are children.

It is not sheer time which our children need, but appropriate care and guidance. This level of guidance certainly does require an investment of time, for it takes longer for an adult to, say, show a child how to clean a room than for that person to clean it or to pay someone else to do so. . . .

Saying that children need a certain level of attention does not, however, mean they need the kind of intense attention which has come to be expected of stay-at-home mothers. Neither does this justify the belief that day-care providers are simply incapable of caring as adequately for children as mothers who act out of love and not for pay, one of Mr. Gelernter's arguments for returning mothers to the home. . . . If providing compensation in the form of money is not a method sufficient to ensure quality in matters related to care-giving, why do we pay our doctors and nurses in greenbacks instead of fretting that they do not serve us out of love? . . .

Mothers should not be the only members of society expected to feel a special connection with children. . . . But if our children's problems can be solved by keeping mothers at home, we need not further wonder whether we expect so little of them because we hold ourselves responsible for so little, or because we have failed as adults to create a meaningful world for our children to join, or for other complex reasons which we cannot bind into a tidy theory.

Our children require an investment of our time and our love, but they also need us to do more than simply ask if their mothers should stay home. . . .

TERRELL L. HODGE
Fredericksburg, Virginia

TO THE EDITOR:

David Gelernter relies on well-documented sources for his assertion that children of stay-at-home mothers are better off than those whose parents work. But when it comes to his own pronouncements, he is on shaky ground. Take, for instance: "We are far wealthier than we were in 1965, when far fewer of our mothers worked. . . ." This statement seems not to take into consideration what the dollar could buy then and how many more dollars are needed to buy the same thing now. In 1965 only my father worked, . . . yet we lived in a huge, single-family brick house in Queens and owned land in Vermont.

I am probably making more money today than my father did then, but I cannot pay the mortgage and raise my family on my income alone; we need my wife's. And we live in a semi-detached house, much small-

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er than the one I grew up in. (Forget about owning land in New England.) It seems to me that mothers work these days not because they are joining a revolution, but out of economic necessity.

LEONARD GETZ
Merion, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

David Gelernter is whistling in the breeze. This is 1996. Mothers in North America will not be staying home in droves any time soon unless a totalitarian government arises and succeeds in imprisoning them there.

Does this mean our children are doomed? Hardly. Humanity continually reconfigures itself in a variety of weird and wonderful ways to ensure the survival of its progeny. While I would never suggest that human nature is infinitely malleable, is it not possible that "the predatory interests of the typical man" may actually not be hard-wired in the human being? Is it not possible that the base male Mr. Gelernter posits may be transformed into a willing participant in a way of life which allows both men and women to work outside the home and, at the same time, to care for their children?

Perhaps Mr. Gelernter would be less interested in stuffing mothers back into the home if he could be convinced to put a little more faith in fathers as parents. Apparently, as reported in a recent article in the *Wall Street Journal*, a new kind of "collaborative couple" is emerging. Some fathers—an increasing number?—are interested in sharing parenting even if it means sacrificing velocity in their careers. . . .

Whatever its complex causes, the genie is now out of the bottle: the Motherhood Revolution has arisen and taken root. But as revolutions go, it is not very old. We do not expect adjustment in the marketplace to happen without pain and false starts. Surely we cannot expect the inevitable adjustments in the post-Motherhood Revolution family to happen without missteps along the way.

SHIRLEE A. HOFFMAN
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR:

David Gelernter makes a number of valuable points. I would like to add one more in support of his argument. I wonder how many mothers have actually considered the economic gain from working outside the home. A professional woman may well come out ahead as a result of her job, but I doubt that this is true of many lower-paid women, like those who run the checkout counter in a grocery store or serve customers in a dry-cleaning establishment. When one adds up the cost of getting to and from work, day care for the children, extra clothes for the job, and the cost of all the fast food and prepared food purchased to help the harried family save time, the working woman may well have a negative economic gain.

Mr. Gelernter's comment that "society . . . is lined up in force behind the idea of mothers taking jobs" is, I think, the right explanation.

PHILIP H. SMITH, JR.
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

DAVID GELERNTER writes:

The main theme that runs through these letters is this: why should the burden of child-rearing fall on women? I have neglected "the critical role of fathers in child-rearing" and have wrongly accepted "the necessity of the traditional roles of mother and father. Why must women sacrifice everything for family and society, when men need not?" Especially in today's new world, where the old-fashioned male is confidently expected to complete his transformation soon "into a willing participant in a way of life which allows both men and women to work outside the home. . . ."

I address this complaint sadly. I am reminded of a paper by the philosopher John Searle, in which he answers some technical objections to his claim that you cannot give a computer a mind merely by running the right program on it. "It is not easy for me to imagine," Searle writes, "how someone who was not in the grip of an ideology would find the idea at all plausible." He answers his opponents on their terms, but is scrupulous enough to warn his readers first that they do not need to follow him into the dark world beyond common sense.

Amy L. Wax dismisses society's claim that women have a "natural inclination" for child-rearing as "vague talk." And what is all this vague talk about the sky being blue? "The special tie women have with children is recognized by everyone," wrote pioneer feminist Shulamith Firestone in 1970 (the citation is from an excellent piece by Wendy Shalit in the *Weekly Standard*). Here are the facts: women and men are different; the differences are such as to make women better than men, on the whole, at caring for children. Obviously this doesn't hold for every woman and every man, but I am talking average cases. Every sensible person knows this to be true, and persons who do not ought to be pitied, not remonstrated with.

These are not the sort of facts we infer; they are facts we *see*, just as we see that the sky is blue. But they do have consequences that can be measured, for those of us who believe (wrongly) that only measurable propositions can be true. For example, violent crimes are committed mainly by men. The big problem of the underclass is single mothers, not single fathers. Fathers in the slums abandon their children in droves. Nothing stops mothers from doing the same—these women are obviously in the habit of doing what they want; but in conditions as close to the primitive state of nature as you can find in a civilized country (if this is one), mothers care for their children and fathers abandon them—because, on the whole, women are drawn to children more strongly than men are.

The big, built-in difference between male and female inclinations is clear when you consider children's toys. Despite society's best efforts, girls favor dolls. (Recent *Wall Street Journal* headline: "Girls' Favorite Play Things: Dolls, Dolls, and Dolls.") An acquaintance (herself an ardent feminist) told me this story: a feminist mother had resolved to rear her children in an evenhanded, "gender-neutral" way, and refused to buy dolls for her little girl. But she relented, the day she came home to find the child giving her toy trucks a bath. Common sense rediscovered. There is a chilling echo of that story in a passage by columnist Krista Ramsey quoted in a recent *American Spectator*. Ramsey

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takes her child to a toy store: "'Let's look down this aisle,' I tell my daughter, steering her toward soccer balls and shin guards." But despite mom's sage advice, the little girl wants a Barbie doll. So mother takes child firmly in hand and marches her away from the awful dolls, presumably to buy her shin guards. The girl is no doubt thrilled. Feminists optimistically tug their daughters away from dolls the way Sisyphus optimistically pushes his rock uphill.

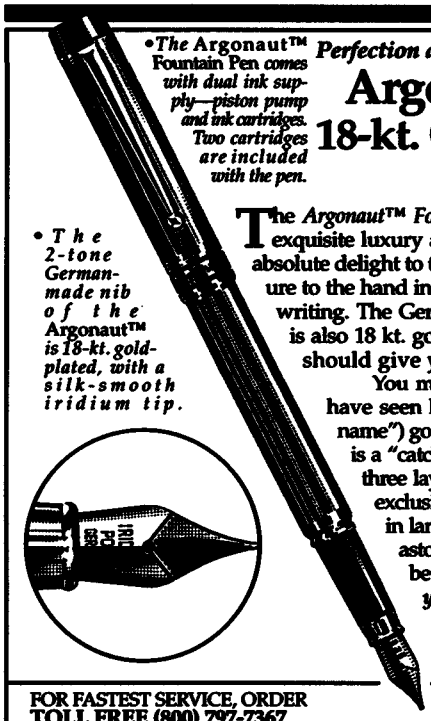
In short, I urged women and not men to stay home and rear the children because women are capable of being mothers and men aren't. If you don't know the difference between mothers and fathers, any two-year-old will explain it to you. I am myself more or less the best damned father in the world, as far as I can tell (luckily, modesty is not indispensable to superb fathering), and nothing gives me more pride than my superior performance in this role. Nothing even comes close. But on those few occasions when hubris has tricked me into believing that I might be the right parent to comfort a crying child or sing a sick one to sleep, my young boys have always set me straight.

The other objections are hard to take seriously. A subsidiary theme in several is disregard for history. Sue Matorin writes of a poll revealing that "many Americans have very real concerns that one wage earner might lose a job and that one income would be insufficient. . . ." It is impossible not to sympathize, but such concerns are sadly commonplace in American (and every other kind of) history. Unemployment today is low and living standards are high. I don't doubt that many people are anxious anyway and have reason to be, but the interesting question is why so many of them have addressed that anxiety by sacrificing something that previous generations would never have sacrificed. "We now recognize the family as a system," Miss Matorin writes, "and the critical role of parental teamwork. . . ." I hope she doesn't think that this remarkable insight just recently hit us. That "we are far wealthier than we were in 1965," which Leonard Getz doubts, is no topic for debate, it's an economic fact. It doesn't mean that each one of us is wealthier. It's a statement about how things are on the whole.

If paying money is not "sufficient to ensure quality in matters related to caregiving," Terrell L. Hodge asks, "why do we pay our doctors and nurses in greenbacks instead of fretting that they do not serve us out of love?" He seems to be arguing my side of the debate instead of his. If a sick person is lucky enough to be able to turn to a doctor who "serves him out of love," you can be darned sure he does. It's a tough world and not everybody has that privilege. But one privilege nearly everybody *does* have, until we step in and take it away, is the privilege of being reared as a child by someone who loves him.

Several writers insist that mothering is a miserable occupation, but I don't believe them. Most occupations have good and bad points; mothering is a particularly hard one, and makes formidable demands. So does working in a steel mill, and my guess is that the rewards of mothering are better even if the pay is worse. Anyone can locate a few absolutely legitimate reasons to complain about his lot if he wants to, up to and including the Queen of Sheba (never mind the Queen of England); but my grandmothers and my mother didn't find mothering miserable and my wife doesn't either, and for me they swing more weight than Susan E. Ireland does.

If mothering were a worse job than the jobs today's working mothers hold, I would expect this country to



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be happier than it used to be before the Motherhood Revolution. But from what I can tell (admittedly this is a hard thing to judge), it is a lot sadder.

Susan Ireland writes, also, that I am "disingenuous" to suggest that women might have taken over central roles in running the schools because "full-time mothers have historically been viewed as addlepated ditzes." But of course this "addlepated ditzes" business is exactly why I wrote what I did—that changing society's demeaning view of full-time mothers would have been a worthier path for feminists than the one they chose, the path of joining the Addlepated Ditz brigade in demeaning and condescending to full-time mothers.

"Mr. Gelernter is whistling in the breeze," writes Shirlee A. Hoffman, and she is probably right. Then again, if you had surveyed this proud, triumphant, forward-moving country around 1960, it's unlikely you would have foreseen today's moral and spiritual collapse. Things change, and it's lucky they do. But even if Miss Hoffman is right, a person has an obligation to tell the truth whether or not anyone is listening.

There is a passage in Amy Wax's letter that captures, it seems to me, all the bitter sadness, the abject loneliness and failure, of our feminist republic. For a woman to depend on her husband for financial support is, she writes, "irksome and humiliating." It must be humiliating also for a man to depend on his wife for a home and the care of his children. Or are those things too insignificant to engender humiliation? It must be humiliating for children to depend on their parents—surely children are capable of being humiliated; and for us parents who feel that what we get from our children is worth more than what we give, wouldn't that be a humiliating sensation also? I wonder whether she doesn't mean that love itself is humiliating.

Lady feminists and gentlemen boors are united in their dislike of a world built on mutual dependence, and a world built on mutual independence has a tendency—look around you!—to fall apart. I have read many sad sentences in my time, but none sadder than Amy Wax's.

Homosexual Marriage

TO THE EDITOR:

One is tempted to greet James Q. Wilson's article, "Against Homosexual Marriage" [March], with the same kind of bumper-sticker response often given by pro-choice advocates: "Opposed to gay marriage? Don't have one." But his arguments—serious and full of thought (if not thoughtful) as they are—deserve much more.

The title is itself an attempt to frame the debate falsely. Gay people do not want "homosexual marriage" (or even "gay marriage," though this is sometimes a useful shorthand): we just want *marriage*. . . . If marriage is indeed a right—which, contrary to Mr. Wilson's apparent disdain for the concept, virtually all Americans as well as judges agree it is—it would be a very hollow right indeed if we were never able to marry the one person we actually love. . . .

It is telling that Mr. Wilson warns: ". . . We may be about to accept homosexual marriage." Who is "we"? Heterosexuals who oppose gay-marriage rights? The last time I checked, rights were something you had regardless of what anyone else thought—even the majority. We as gay people do hope that the marriage issue will help educate other Americans about our actual lives, and thus increase their support for marriage and all other basic rights. But ultimately this is a question of civil justice, not subject to the shifting winds of popular sentiment. . . . Gay couples, who are similar to heterosexual pairs in all the ways that matter for marriage, cannot be denied the equal protection of the law. I do not say so; the Constitution does. . . .

Mr. Wilson's allegation that public opinion on interracial couples is not comparable to attitudes toward same-sex couples leaves him more vulnerable to criticism than he suspects. In 1967, when the Supreme Court struck down miscegenation laws, the same (or an even higher) percentage of people across the country opposed mixed-race marriage as oppose gay marriage today. But this, too, misses the point: courts do not conduct opinion polls, they enforce justice. . . .

Mr. Wilson devotes much of his article to a discussion of Andrew Sullivan's book, *Virtually Normal*. But I do not know whom either Mr. Sullivan or Mr. Wilson is referring to when they separately imply that male couples are more willing than heterosexuals to have "open" relationships. Even if this were true, it is irrelevant to this discussion because (enforced) monogamy is not necessary for legal marriage. (In some states adultery may be grounds for divorce, but even that is waning.)

Although Mr. Wilson seems to want to separate the institution from the way real people actually behave, it might be healthier to ask, first and foremost, that hypocrisy be put on hold. I am in favor of monogamy, too, but most heterosexuals—and perhaps homosexuals as well—would seem to practice a code other than the one they preach. But gay people, like most Americans, care far less about the particulars of the rules and laws applied to us than we do that they are applied to us equally. Unlike the meaningless phrases so often used to deny gay people our place in society, the bumper sticker for this cause might very well—and very accurately—read: "No more special rights for heterosexuals."

JEFFREY NICKEL
Forum on the Right to Marriage
Boston, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

James Q. Wilson's grab-bag of arguments against homosexual marriage veers from litigation to social policy by way of biblical exegesis, all enlisted in a querulous attempt to refute Andrew Sullivan's *Virtually Normal*. But Mr. Wilson's arguments ring hollow, because beneath the seemingly learned citations lies little more than incomprehension of what he opposes.

The strongest argument for homosexual marriage is that it preserves and promotes a set of moral values that are essential to civilized society. Like heterosexual marriage, it sanctions loyalty, unselfishness, and sexual fidelity; it rejects the promiscuous, the self-serving, the transitory relation-

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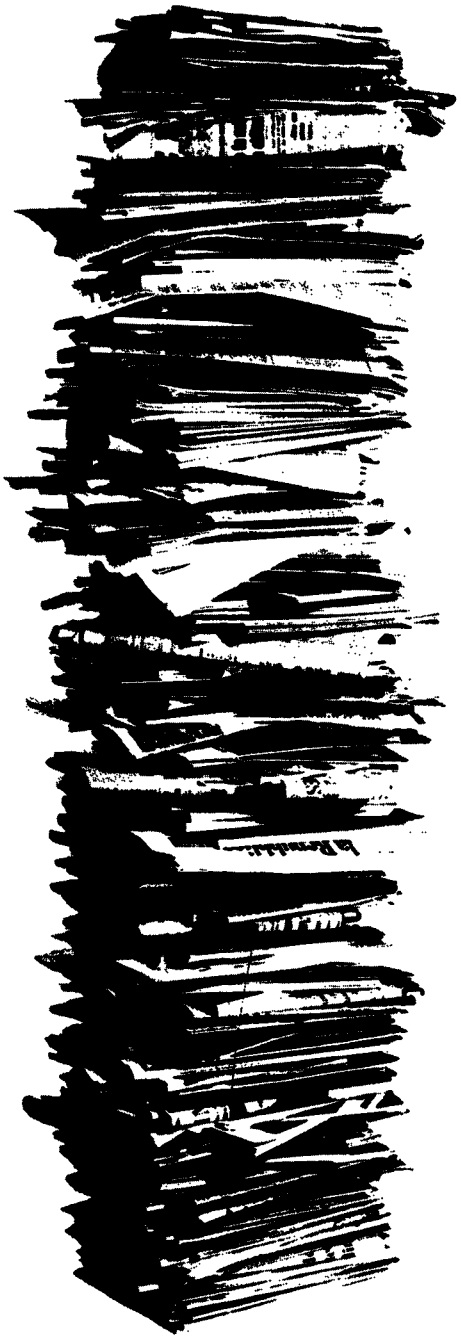

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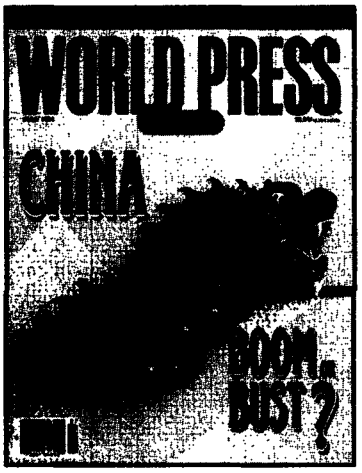

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ship. Given the choice between building family units and preventing them, any conservative should favor the former.

In the face of that possibility, however, Mr. Wilson again and again confesses that he simply does not comprehend the implications of homosexual marriage. "Those are very large assumptions that no modern society has ever tested," he sighs at one point. "There is very little research on the matter," he writes of children raised by homosexual couples. (There is more than he thinks there is.) He is even boggled by something as minor as the inadequacy of terminology: "There is no settled language for even describing . . . such persons," he clucks about sperm donors and surrogate mothers. Seemingly he cannot distinguish trivial issues from substantive ones.

Mr. Wilson rightly places a great deal of weight on tradition and established custom, but he uses history and religion in disingenuous ways. He professes concern about religious injunctions "in a profoundly religious nation," as if such injunctions prevented Jews from intermarrying, or stopped Catholics from using birth control.

His invocation of the biblical model of marriage—which he tries to use as a bulwark against gay marriage—conspicuously overlooks the polygamous character of many biblical marriages. (Polygamy has stood the test of time in numerous cultures; does Mr. Wilson endorse it on those grounds?) The Bible, of course, does not anticipate homosexual marriage, but biblical marriages themselves are neither as simple nor as wholesome as Mr. Wilson would have us believe. . . .

Homosexual marriage is hotly debated because it is symbolic. It is made to bear the weight of any and all fears about the decline of morality, the instability of the family, the fragmentation of society. "Marriage is in serious decline," reports Mr. Wilson; he regrets the "contemporary outlook that makes law the search for rights." These are grave issues, but creating a legal basis for gay marriage would not affect them at all, except to strike a blow for domestic stability and responsibility. More thoughtful people than Mr. Wilson can see beyond the false symbolism to the reality of the conservative values inherent in homosexual marriage.

BOB GOLDFARB
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

James Q. Wilson attempts to take a high-minded, analytical, "moral" stance against the issue of same-sex marriages, but he has missed the practical point of the argument.

If one accepts that a homosexual orientation is set early in life, that it is not chosen, and that it cannot be changed, then one is left with two main options: either encourage the person to be the most moral person he can be or encourage the denial of his sexuality. . . .

Would Mr. Wilson prefer a (straight) child of his to marry a homosexual who had denied his or her sexual orientation? Or would he perhaps prefer that if his child were homosexual, he or she would have the courage to be honest and open with him and seek his blessing for the most stable form of relationship possible? This is a question of truth and honesty, not of dissembling and evasion.

PATRICK MEADE
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . Certainly the struggle of homosexuals for a place at the table of American society ultimately requires that society to reject its centuries-old moral proscription of homosexuality, and this will not be effected by judicial fiat. It will probably be won on a one-by-one basis, as individual heterosexual Americans encounter their fellow homosexual citizens and judge our morality in the sum total of our social behavior and demeanor, of which our sexual orientation is but a part. . . .

The point Mr. Wilson appears to be making is that whatever door is opened onto the promised land of wedded bliss for homosexual Americans, it should be the result of societal consensus and not of judicial *diktat*. As a conservative, I heartily agree with him; on the other hand, given the historic role of the judiciary to prod a reluctant majority to confer constitutional protections upon those whom the majority in its prejudice would otherwise fail to protect, I cannot rouse myself too much to sound alarms at the actions of the Hawaii supreme court in reversing a decision that would have denied a marriage permit to a same-sex couple.

It is a bit complacent to denounce judicial determination to protect minority rights when one is in the majority, with no experience of the discrimination that resulted in the petition for relief in the first place. It is, moreover, a matter of historical record that the first arguments against such judicial "activism" involve the simultaneous denial that the minority has any need of protection with the assertion that enforcing the protections would inevitably weaken and ultimately destroy the majority. . . .

Although the issues of racism and homophobia are not entirely equivalent, the reactions of the majority to the attempts of the minority to wrest legal equality as a precursor to moral equality have been similar. Mr. Wilson's shockingly careless statements about homosexuals ("the great tendency of homosexual males to be promiscuous," an assertion also made by careless whites about black males not so long ago) demonstrate precisely why gays have turned to the courts first rather than to the legislatures. Legislators are free to reflect and codify prejudices; courts must apply a higher standard. . . .

Majoritarian complacency and irrationality toward minorities are precisely the concerns that led the Founding Fathers to incorporate the Bill of Rights into the Constitution. If Mr. Wilson is truly alarmed at the prospect of homosexual marriages, he would do his cause more justice if he subjected his assumptions regarding homosexuals to a much more rigorous analysis. Only then could he focus fairly on the underlying point that the distinctions between hetero- and homosexual Americans "involve the nature of marriage and thus the very meaning—even more, the very possibility—of society."

MARTY KELLER
Sacramento, California

TO THE EDITOR:

I do not believe that same-sex relationships are inher-

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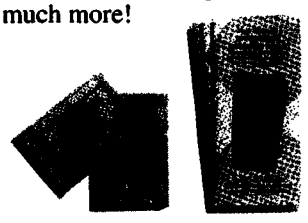

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ently immoral. If it is good for society when heterosexual couples make a vow to be faithful in lifetime commitments and settle down in permanent, legally sanctioned relationships, why is it bad when gay couples do likewise?

Out of one side of their mouths, members of the religious Right suggest that gays are promiscuous, engaging in repeated sexual acts with unmarried partners. Out of the other, they say that allowing gays to marry will be the end of civilization.

James Q. Wilson says that many people justify their opposition to gay marriage by invoking longstanding tradition. However, tradition has been used in the past as a rationale for slavery and for denying women the right to vote. But reason has prevailed and we are all better off today because of it. . . .

Society has a compelling interest in encouraging stable, monogamous relationships between adults—straight and gay. It is time for reasonable people to look beyond stereotypes and face the facts: gay people have the same human needs for genuine affection and committed companionship as do heterosexuals. And so they deserve the same rights and responsibilities in the eyes of the law. What is truly immoral is the religious Right's constant campaign of slander against decent, taxpaying, law-abiding gay Americans who want nothing more than to live happy lives.

ALAN L. LIGHT
Iowa City, Iowa

TO THE EDITOR:

James Q. Wilson, heretofore one of the calmest and most reasonable analysts of our social condition, pulls out all stops in his attempt to discredit homosexual marriage. . . . Nowhere in his argument does he resort to homophobic outbursts, but the outcome is the same, i.e., the denial to gays and lesbians of that which is granted to all other—that is, heterosexual—Americans: the right to state-sanctioned marriage. . . .

Further, Mr. Wilson's argument that the exclusion of homosexuals from the mainstream would lead to stability leaves one nonplussed. When, one may ask, has the advocacy of second-class citizenship for one group ever led to anything but anti-social behavior? . . . Same-sex marriage would enhance the stability of our society, an end to which Mr. Wilson in his distinguished career has given so much laudable advocacy.

FREDERIC WILE
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

James Q. Wilson states that "long before the civil-rights movement, many Southern states had repealed [their miscegenation] laws." In *Loving* v. *Virginia*, decided on June 12, 1967, such statutes were held to be unconstitutional. Speaking through Chief Justice Earl Warren, the Supreme Court of the United States noted that Virginia was at that time "one of the sixteen states which prohibit and punish marriages on the basis of racial classification." A footnote to that passage listed Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia. The footnote was prefaced by the statement that after the initiation of that litigation, in 1967, Maryland had repealed its prohibitions against interracial marriage. But surely 1967 was not "long before" the civil-rights movement, and Maryland is *one* border state, not "many Southern" ones.

HANS W. BAADE
School of Law
University of Texas
Austin, Texas

TO THE EDITOR:

James Q. Wilson . . . first states that the Supreme Court of Hawaii ruled that under the "equal-protection clause of that state's constitution, any law based on distinctions of sex was suspect and subject to judicial scrutiny." . . . He then goes on to discuss the "full-faith-and-credit" clause in the Constitution and says that

> a homosexual couple in a state like Texas, where the population is overwhelmingly opposed to [same-sex] unions, may soon be able to fly to Hawaii, get married, and then return to live in Texas as lawfully wedded.

Mr. Wilson seems to have little understanding of how constitutional law works. Simply put, the full-faith-and-credit clause of the Constitution does not give one state unlimited power to bind other states to its particular public policy. Any state court may launch a collateral attack on the jurisdiction of any other state to control a matter in dispute.

Let me give three examples of how the system might work.

The first involves two homosexuals, residents and domiciliaries of the state of Hawaii, who enter into a marriage according to the laws of the state of Hawaii. Later, one of them commits a crime in another state. That state attempts to force the "spouse" to testify at trial. The "spouse" attempts to invoke the "spousal-immunity" privilege to be excused from testifying. In this case, the full-faith-and-credit clause would probably force the forum state to recognize the marriage and excuse the witness spouse from testifying.

The second example is one in which two homosexuals, residents and domiciliaries of Hawaii, enter into a valid Hawaiian marriage. They move to another state and seek to force that state to recognize their marriage. Here the result is not at all clear. Some liberal judiciaries might accept the "marriage," but conservative state judiciaries might not.

The third example is the one Mr. Wilson offers and is the easiest one to deal with. That is where two homosexuals, residents and domiciliaries of one state, travel from that state to Hawaii, enter into a Hawaiian marriage, and then return home and hope to force their home state to accept the validity of their marriage. In this case, no state court would find itself compelled to honor the marriage because the two parties to the marriage were neither residents nor domiciliaries of Hawaii when the marriage was entered into. . . .

Although I find myself in general agreement with Mr. Wilson's policy arguments, I am compelled to point out his errors because they are being read and repeated by other journalists. For example, Frank Rich in the *New York Times* repeated Mr. Wilson's claim that other states would be forced to recognize homosexual marriages "consecrated" in Hawaii.

In his conclusion, Mr.

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Wilson attacks the policy of leaving difficult social problems to the courts, and says that we would be better served if the controversial areas (abortion, marriage, military service) were dealt with by the legislatures. He is, of course, right, but he misses one point. Judicial activism does not exist in a vacuum. Judicial activism has been permitted only when the legislatures have been controlled by forces which favor certain policies but are unwilling to enact them themselves and have left it to the courts to do it for them.

But this can change. . . . The best example of how this can happen is the Rose Bird court in California, which ruled the state with complete disregard for the laws written by the legislature or the will of the people until three of its members were defeated in a recall election in 1986. Since then, the California court has been quite conservative. . . .

SUSAN JORDAN
Los Angeles, California

TO THE EDITOR:

. . . An article in *USA Today* about homosexual marriage reported that a homosexual man had this short explanation of why he should be allowed to marry his boyfriend: "We love each other." My sister and I also love each other. If the government approves of gay marriage, why not brother-sister marriage? If same-gender sex is normal, why not same-family sex?

Culture teaches people how to act. A culture that celebrates brother-sister marriage will produce many brother-sister marriages. A culture that celebrates homosexuality will have many homosexuals. A culture that celebrates heterosexuality as the norm will be overwhelmingly heterosexual and the most stable and creative society, I believe, because heterosexuality is most in tune with human nature.

No religion or folk tradition claims that heterosexuality and marriage are the magic keys to happiness; such things are simply considered the basic building blocks of social stability.

MICHAEL FLANAGAN
Chicago, Illinois

TO THE EDITOR:

Throughout history, most societies have organized themselves in terms of kinship. Every individual had rights and duties, obligations and privileges, depending upon the persons to whom he was related. Without relatives, a person was not a social being; to become a social being, the person had to be among kin, by adoption if not by birth. This is a process with which the anthropologists of my generation were familiar, although it can also be seen in the Bible. For these societies, marriage was not simply about what happened between a heterosexual couple; it provided a woman's children with relatives beyond her natal family.

Children always have a genitor; marriage was a declaration that children would have a *pater* as well. They would then be recognized by a man who assumed responsibility for their welfare, and, even more important, it also ensured that the children would be incorporated within the group of relatives on the paternal side, and this regardless of who had (sexually) sired them.

In many legally recognized situations in the U.S. today, marriage has been redefined as a contract having to do with the welfare and the division of economic responsibility between two people who feel bonded by affection and sexual relations. This has been exacerbated by the decay of kinship obligations, and the concomitant notion of single-parent families. Whether or not children have a *pater* or other kin, they now acquire a social identity through formal institutions such as schools and other governmental agencies. Meanwhile, marriage has come to be defined as sharing such items as a residence and health insurance, and licensing sexual relations.

MURRAY L. WAX
Department of Anthropology
Washington University
St. Louis, Missouri

TO THE EDITOR:

I suspect James Q. Wilson is correct in asserting that most Americans would reject state sanction of homosexual marriage. I believe this is equally the case here in Canada, notwithstanding recent legislative measures introduced by the government in Ottawa which would ban discrimination based on "sexual orientation" (could this serve to protect pedophiles, too?) and which represent one more step toward granting homosexuality full legitimacy.

So far, however, this silent majority of Canadians—in the face of an aggressive lobbying campaign waged by determined homosexual activists and their liberal cheerleaders in the media, and from fear of appearing "intolerant" in a dominant culture ruled by relativism—has completely abdicated the moral argument. . . .

What the now-impoverished and one-sided Canadian debate desperately needs is precisely the sort of reasoned and compelling argument put forward by Mr. Wilson, one which still has, even at the end of the 20th century, enough self-assurance to label something as just plain *wrong*.

Congratulations to COMMENTARY for once again standing firm on an issue that has, apparently, intimidated too many of us. . . .

HILLEL NEUER
McGill University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

JAMES Q. WILSON writes:

I did not expect to change the views of anyone with my essay on homosexual marriage, and the letters printed above confirm that prediction. It is difficult to say much more here, because the issue rests on radically different assumptions about society. Jeffrey Nickel says that marriage is a matter of individual rights, and Patrick Meade says it is a matter of honesty; I say it is in fact a matter of moral order. I have not persuaded them; they have not persuaded me. Bob Goldfarb says, rightly, that marriage is about moral values, but then sees no arguable difference between mixed-sex and same-sex marriages. I believe there is a difference, one that leads the great majority of people to oppose the latter in ways that are quite different from the now departed objection to trans-racial marriages.

Marty Keller says he is opposed to making changes by judicial *diktat* except in the case of same-sex marriages, because there the courts can "prod" a "reluctant" majority to do the right thing. That is an interesting thought, but I do not believe it is an accurate one. Marriage differs from slavery or the franchise in ways I think

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most people understand even when they cannot express it any better than I. (I should add that Mr. Keller's objections to my reference to the promiscuity of homosexual males was not the result of my "careless" invention; it was taken from Andrew Sullivan's book.)

Alan L. Light is convinced that tradition was equally wrong in defending slavery, limiting voting to men, and opposing homosexual marriage. I think there are important differences among these, but since I have not convinced him yet, I doubt I can convince him now. I would urge him, however, to ponder Michael Flanagan's letter: "tradition" also opposes brother-sister marriage, even when the man and woman love each other. Should that tradition also be swept aside whenever someone asserts a "right" to incestuous marriages?

Susan Jordan criticizes me for not understanding how the full-faith-and-credit clause of the Constitution would affect the interstate standing of same-sex marriages. She may be right, but my reading of the case laws suggests that her view is contested and uncertain. I doubt that anyone now can predict how the Supreme Court will eventually decide this matter, which is why there is so much legal uncertainty about proposed state statutes limiting marriages to mixed-sex unions.

Murray L. Wax makes an important point that clarifies, more sharply than I did, the utter transformation in the meaning of marriage that has occurred in the last few decades. For millennia marriage meant a sacred union that assured each child of a legally responsible father and a place in a wider network of kin. Today it is, as Mr. Nickel puts it quite baldly, an arrangement of rights that courts ought to enforce (but only so long, I suppose, as each party wants that "right"). The result of that transformation has been a social catastrophe evident in high rates of divorce, the end of any public censure of adultery, and the rise of single-parent families. I doubt that extending the marital union (as opposed to other unions, informally agreed to by the parties but not licensed by society) to gay and lesbian couples will do much to reverse the rapid decline in what that union was once supposed to mean.

Finally, I would like to thank Hillel Neuer for his comments.

Neoconservatism

TO THE EDITOR:

In Norman Podhoretz's eulogy and apologia ["Is Neoconservatism Dead?," March], I came across a claim which I have now seen in print several times and which I either do not understand or else believe to be simply mythical. Mr. Podhoretz writes that "thanks to the influence of neoconservatism on the conservative movement in general, the philistine indifference to culture which once pervaded that movement is largely gone."

In any discussion of post-war American conservatism before the rise of neoconservatism, Russell Kirk's work is the place to begin. Writing in the 1950's, Kirk identified T.S. Eliot as the greatest conservative mind of his day, for, among other things, Eliot probed in his social writings the relationship of culture to politics. Eliot believed that the "abnormalities" of such writers as D.H. Lawrence led to deleterious political and social consequences. Before Eliot, Kirk saw the humanists Irving Babbitt at Harvard and Paul Elmer More at Princeton as the representative conservatives of the 1920's. Before those two professors, Henry Adams loomed large. And, in Kirk's account, the entire conservative tradition was founded on the thought of Edmund Burke, who as a young man wrote a treatise on aesthetics; who in his indictment of the French Revolution raised his greatest alarm at the corruption of taste brought on by Rousseau's sentimentalism; and who believed that the impact of art forms like the theater on manners and morals was more important for the health of a polity than formal laws and written constitutions.

For decades, when asked to formulate a political program for contemporary conservatives, Kirk tirelessly preached what Mr. Podhoretz now seems to believe is a neoconservative insight: that culture is deeper than politics and that the cult lies at the heart of culture. Kirk's emphasis on cultural issues to the exclusion of virtually every practical policy matter led until only a few years ago to a rather patronizing neoconservative trope of conceding to such "paleoconservatives" as Kirk the "soft" realm of culture while they focused their attention on the hard-headed stuff of real public policy: taxing and spending and making war. How strange to read now that the old conservatism was indifferent to culture.

If Mr. Podhoretz believes that the elites who shaped the political thought of the old conservative movement were indifferent to culture, he is simply mistaken. On the other hand, if he believes that neoconservative intellectuals have succeeded, where a previous generation of elites failed, in making culture a mass political concern, surely it is the increasingly poisonous culture itself that has done this work, and not the arguments of either the neoconservatives or the paleoconservatives.

MARK C. HENRIE
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

TO THE EDITOR:

In his recent book on the history of anti-Communism, *Not Without Honor*, Richard Gid Powers claims that during the darkest days of the movement, when it was being summarily identified with McCarthyism *tout court*,

> one man summoned the will, the strength, and the imagination to commence the giant task of rebuilding the anti-Communist coalition. This was Norman Podhoretz.

Perhaps Mr. Podhoretz's unexpected victory after fighting the good fight accounts for the elegiac tone in his eulogy for neoconservatism, but when one considers the specific contribution he made in those dark hours, one wonders if his Periclean funeral oration is not premature. He mentions, for example, the reluctance of businessmen to defend the cause of the economic system of which they were the linchpins, thereby proving Lenin's cynical maxim that capitalists would gladly sell Communists the rope they would need when, comes the revolution, it was time for hanging these selfsame noose-making lackeys.

But have things changed

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all that much since the fall of Communism? It is, after all, with the connivance of the barons of the media conglomerates that so much degradation is pouring out of our television sets and movie theaters. Certainly insofar as neoconservatism is simply to be identified with the anti-Communist cause outright, its moment in history has passed. But it made such a signal contribution because, in Mr. Podhoretz's words, it exposed "more passionately and more effectively than any other group . . . those lies for what they were: expressions of hatred, rooted in utopian greed"—a spirit of raw resentment against good order that still animates our media elites, if more subtly and with an extra dollop of nihilism added to the heady brew.

Nor is that the only example that could be adduced of the continuing need for neoconservatives to rescue conservatism from its own self-proclaimed friends. I do not much go in for the endless worry-wart hand-wringing about the implications of Patrick J. Buchanan's nomination campaign, but that picture of him holding up an assault rifle during the Arizona primary nicely symbolizes the still pressing need for an *intelligent* conservatism, that is, one which seeks, in the words of Mr. Podhoretz,

> to marry ideological passion to intellectual disinterestedness, [to] give vent to a heated sense of urgency about the present moment while maintaining a sense of historical perspective.

The battle lines have no doubt shifted since the fall of the Berlin Wall; but there is much mendacity afoot today, on both Right and Left, large amounts of which are directly related genealogically to earlier liberal and radical connivance with Communism, and I cannot help feeling that the contribution of those who trace *their* genealogy to the legacy of Norman Podhoretz's COMMENTARY will have an equally important contribution to make in the next several decades.

EDWARD T. OAKES, S.J.
Seton Hall University
South Orange, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

As the editor of the Cracow-based political/cultural bimonthly magazine *Arka* (now *Arcana*), I wanted to express my gratitude to Norman Podhoretz for his editorship of COMMENTARY and to stress how important American neoconservatism, especially as presented in the magazine's pages, was in overcoming Communism in my part of Europe. I still remember when I first read a selection of COMMENTARY articles (in Polish translation) printed by an underground press when Poland was under martial law. The articles offered encouragement during that rather somber period. At that time, the most active (or most vocal) part of the opposition was led by social-democratic ex-Marxists who were still under the influence of their first love. Any intellectual or political ventures of more conservative leaning were ridiculed not only by the Communists but by our fellow dissidents. But the 80's marked the beginning of the rebirth of conservatism in most of East-Central Europe, a development in which COMMENTARY played an important intellectual role. I have evidence of the strong influence the magazine had not only in Poland but in such countries as Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria.

Let me say one other thing. The fact that Jews were so prominent in American neoconservatism was a positive element in the acceptance of the movement's ideas in East-Central Europe. This region has its own, very complicated relationship to its Jewish population. One of the most

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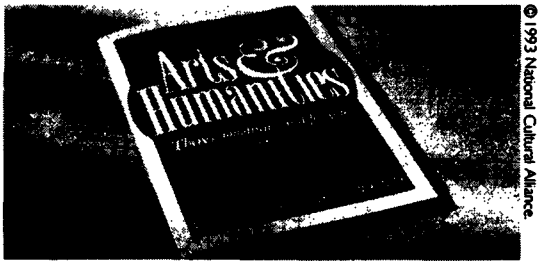

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recent chapters in this history was, of course, the Holocaust. Many Holocaust survivors who chose in the immediate postwar period to stay rather than to emigrate to Israel joined the political apparatus of the new Communist party. This is a sociological fact that is nevertheless often treated as if it were a stereotype. What COMMENTARY and the other prominent Jewish neoconservatives accomplished was to break the link between Jewishness and radical, leftist, and Communist politics which has so haunted the East-Central European mind (if there is one). So for this, too, I thank Mr. Podhoretz.

Let me conclude by quoting the first words of the Polish national anthem: "*Jeszcze Polska nie zginela, poki my zyjemy*"—"Poland has not perished yet, we are still living." I think "neoconservatism" should replace *Polska* in Norman Podhoretz's private anthem.

ANDRZEJ NOWAK
Cracow, Poland

NORMAN PODHORETZ writes:

Mark C. Henrie has a point. In fact, I myself recently said something similar about Lionel Trilling's famous charge, made in 1950, that the American conservatives of that era had no ideas. So I would certainly concede that Russell Kirk and the paleoconservatives who followed upon or were associated with him understood the importance of culture. Nevertheless, I stand by the observation that "the conservative movement in general" (which is what I was talking about in my article) had little or no interest in the cultural realm; its ruling passion was directed at issues like taxes and the size of government, and not at the state of the arts or the condition of the intellectual community. Furthermore, while the paleoconservatives did not share in this "philistine indifference," they committed a greater sin in being ranged on the wrong side of the culture wars that reached fever pitch in the 60's and are still raging today. Indeed, there was an ironic confluence between the paleoconservatives and the counterculture of the 60's.

Like T.S. Eliot and the Southern Agrarians by whom they were heavily influenced, the paleoconservatives despised capitalism, industrialism, and bourgeois democracy no less fervently than did the radicals of the counterculture (leading me to quip at the time that what was new about the New Left was not Left and what was Left about it was not new). These attitudes themselves formed one of the sources of the "increasingly poisonous culture" to which Mr. Henrie refers, and it took the neoconservatives to make that connection clear.

Edward T. Oakes is also concerned about that poisonous culture, and I agree wholeheartedly with him about the continuing need for the kind of battle against it that the neoconservatives waged against the progenitors of the "degradation" of which he speaks. I also agree with him about the continuing need to rescue conservatism from the likes of Patrick J. Buchanan (who, by the way, is rooted intellectually in the paleoconservative tradition). But as I tried to make clear in my article, with the death of neoconservatism in its original form, these jobs will have to be done by "those who trace their genealogy" to it and who now write and think and act in its still living spirit.

I thank Father Oakes for quoting Richard Gid Powers's remarks about me, and for adding a few equally gratifying ones of his own. Then, to top it all off, comes the testimony of Andrzej Nowak concerning the contribution made by COMMENTARY under my editorship "in overcoming Communism" in the countries of East and Central Europe. My cup runneth over.

The Economy

TO THE EDITOR:

Amity Shlaes ["Doom, Gloom, and the Middle Class," February] is entitled to her sarcasm in her discussion of my book, *The End of Affluence*. But she is not entitled to mischaracterize the book completely. I have no idea how she concluded that, "Capturing much of the blame here [for slow growth] is our failure to practice an industrial policy." I have not said, nor do I believe any such thing. Miss Shlaes goes on inexplicably: "Our addiction to free trade is also named . . . as a culprit. . . ." This is a willful oversimplification of the point. And surely one will not find the word addiction or any synonymous thought about free trade in my book. Nor did I write that the "Little Tigers," a phrase I did not use, are doing well ("sell the world's watches," in Miss Shlaes's words) simply because the U.S. underinvests in research-and-development. I trace several more deeply seated problems that I fear Miss Shlaes must have skimmed past, though they occupy most of the book. (She does quote the first line accurately.)

Miss Shlaes, needless to say, never attacks my central theme, which is that a dramatic slowdown in the rate of economic growth has taken place and accounts for many of our most critical problems today. She even goes so far as to imply that my argument depends partly on a trick with graphics. She says that in one of my charts I

> make things look as if the annual growth of our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) declined in a straight diagonal line from 1973 to 1994 [when] in reality growth rates hopped up and down quite a bit during those years, which included the longest uninterrupted expansion in our postwar history.

This is such nonsense that I cannot believe COMMENTARY published it. The long economic expansion of the 1980's she refers to did not raise the rate of productivity growth and did not make up for the slowdown in overall growth over this period. The averages I used are peak to peak, which is what economists of any political stripe would use. No one would dispute them. And I make quite clear that the straight lines in the graphs average out the cycles. . . .

Not every book is a mere polemic. Argue the merits if you choose, but at least respond to what is in the book.

JEFFREY MADRICK
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Amity Shlaes focuses on the economic prospects of the middle class. While this large segment of the American populace can exercise much political power, it is

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unlikely that it will be seduced by populist rhetoric. The middle class has accepted the cold reality that both informal and formal job-related education is a never-ending duty. This in itself should be sufficient to protect the middle class from an increasingly threatening environment of "future shock." The children of immigrants and those merely poor of pocketbook should also have little to worry about.

But the lack of a viable family structure probably dooms any chance for the permanent underclass, the poor of spirit, to take even the first step toward financial viability. Yet without the early inculcation of the virtues of a dedicated work ethic and a willingness to delay gratification, it is virtually impossible to adjust to an economy demanding one do what the ubiquitous computer cannot do: intuit, create, and deal with abstract, analytical thinking.

The growing gap between productive and nonproductive citizenry may inevitably widen to the point where the former perceives the latter as simply faceless, parasitical, and "not like us." The economic losers will be seen merely as outlets for our altruistic impulses. This is not healthy and quickly wears the majority's patience thin. . . . A serious dialogue on this looming dilemma should not be delayed.

DAVID THOMSON
Houston, Texas

AMITY SHLAES writes:

Jeffrey Madrick writes that I wrongly ascribe to him an affection for industrial policy. Yet his book is written in a hortative first-person plural—a royal "we"—that conflates government and business. ("We will also probably have to invest a greater proportion of our income, and to do so more deliberately than in the past.") Specifically, Mr. Madrick worries about the competition offered by "rapidly developing" nations that have generally "stimulated growth by cultivating industries that specialize in exports." Such nations—that is, those which practice industrial policy—have growth rates which the U.S., as his book laments, cannot equal. At other points he is blunter: in the future, he writes,

> decidedly more investment will be needed in research and development to maintain technological leadership, and new kinds of institutions to undertake the scientific research may have to be conceived, perhaps with help from public funds.

In other words, practice *industrial policy*.

The graph at issue would indeed seem to be misleading—to both generalist and professional. It depicts a straight downward diagonal for years when in fact growth rates bumped up and down.

Recent news events have shed some light on the data Mr. Madrick insists signify "the end of affluence." His book notes that the "highest proportion of new jobs in this period [after 1973] was created in the low-paying service sector" and warns (repeatedly) that we must learn to live with such trends. But according to a report in the *New York Times* this past April, a new study by the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) showed that 68 percent of jobs created in recent years were in industries that "pay better wages than the median for all workers. . . ." The CEA: "Employment in 'hamburger-flipping jobs' actually fell between 1994 and 1995." As for the wages whose *stagnation* Mr. Madrick made so central to his thesis, they have lately moved up smartly as well.

None of this is meant to undermine his concern for economic growth, which my article and I, of course, shared and share.

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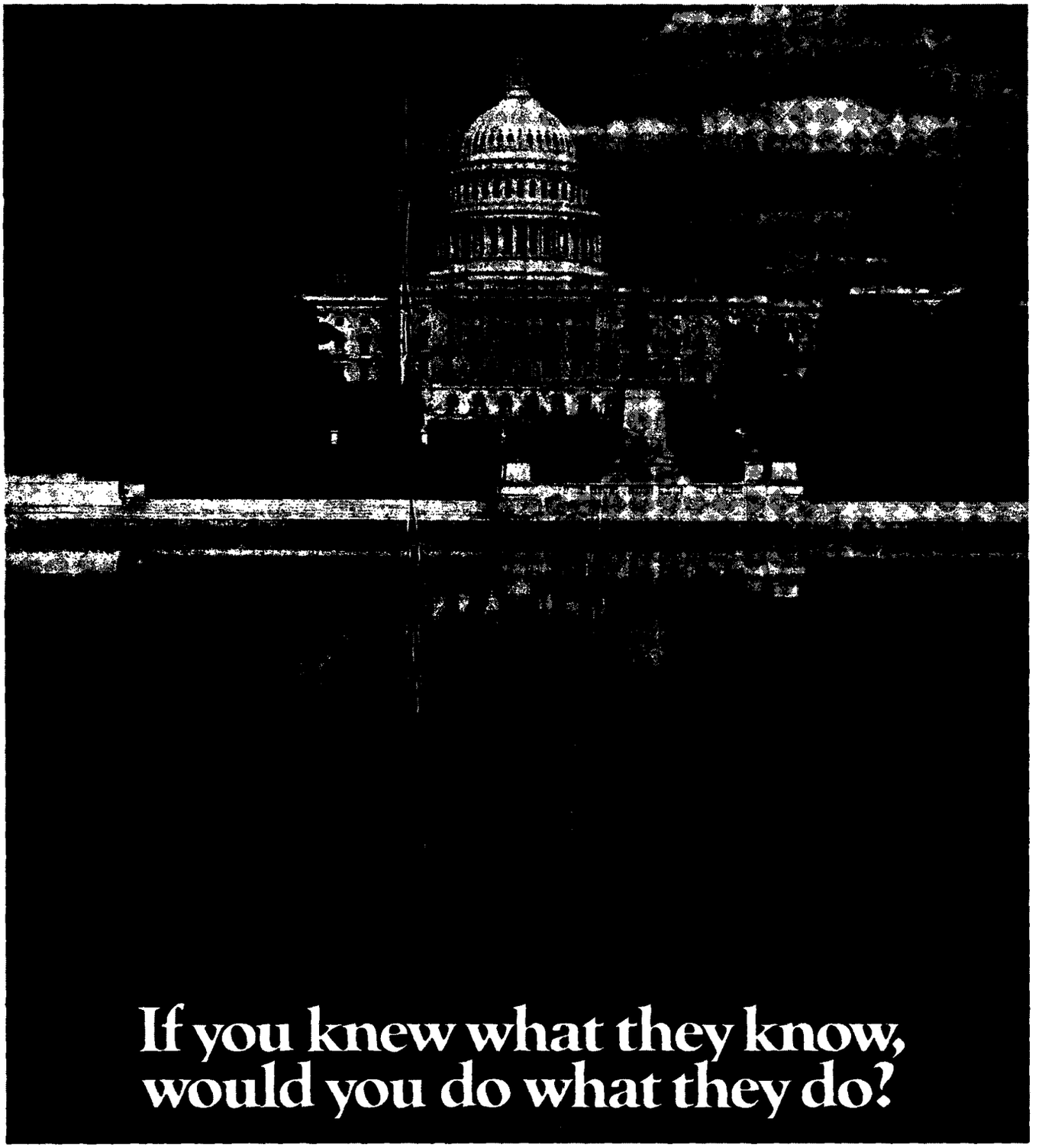

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Commentary
June 1996

The Deniable Darwin

David Berlinski

CHARLES DARWIN presented *On the Origin of Species* to a disbelieving world in 1859—three years after Clerk Maxwell had published "On Faraday's Lines of Force," the first of his papers on the electromagnetic field. Maxwell's theory has by a process of absorption become part of quantum field theory, and so a part of the great canonical structure created by mathematical physics. By contrast, the final triumph of Darwinian theory, although vividly imagined by biologists, remains, along with world peace and Esperanto, on the eschatological horizon of contemporary thought.

"It is just a matter of *time*," one biologist wrote recently, reposing his faith in a receding hereafter, "before this fruitful concept comes to be accepted by the public as wholeheartedly as it has accepted the spherical earth and the sun-centered solar system." Time, however, is what evolutionary biologists have long had, and if general acceptance has not come by now, it is hard to know when it ever will.

IN ITS most familiar, textbook form, Darwin's theory subordinates itself to a haunting and fantastic image, one in which life on earth is represented as a tree. So graphic has this image become that some biologists have persuaded themselves they can *see* the flowering tree standing on a dusty plain, the mammalian twig obliterating itself by anastomosis into a reptilian branch and so backward to the amphibia and then the fish, the sturdy chordate line—our line, *cosa nostra*—moving by slithering stages into the still more primitive trunk of life and so downward to the single irresistible cell that from within its folded chromosomes foretold the living future.

This is nonsense, of course. That densely reticulated tree, with its lavish foliage, is an intellectual construct, one expressing the *hypothesis* of descent with modification. Evolution is a process, one stretching over four billion years. It has not been observed. The past has gone to where the past inevitably goes. The future has not arrived. The present reveals only the detritus of time and chance: the fossil record, and the comparative anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry of different organisms and creatures. Like every other scientific theory, the theory of evolution lies at the end of an inferential trail.

The facts in favor of evolution are often held to be incontrovertible; prominent biologists shake their heads at the obduracy of those who would dispute them. Those facts, however, have been rather less forthcoming than evolutionary biologists might have hoped. If life progressed by an

DAVID BERLINSKI, *who has taught mathematics and philosophy in American and French universities, is the author, most recently, of* A Tour of the Calculus *(Pantheon) and of* The Body Shop, *a novel (forthcoming from St. Martin's). His article, "The Soul of Man Under Physics," appeared in our January issue.*

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accumulation of small changes, as they say it has, the fossil record should reflect its flow, the dead stacked up in barely separated strata. But for well over 150 years, the dead have been remarkably diffident about confirming Darwin's theory. Their bones lie suspended in the sands of time—theromorphs and therapsids and things that must have gibbered and then squeaked; but there are gaps in the graveyard, places where there should be intermediate forms but where there is nothing whatsoever instead.[1]

Before the Cambrian era, a brief 600 million years ago, very little is inscribed in the fossil record; but then, signaled by what I imagine as a spectral puff of smoke and a deafening *ta-da!*, an astonishing number of novel biological structures come into creation, and they come into creation at once.

Thereafter, the major transitional sequences are incomplete. Important inferences begin auspiciously, but then trail off, the ancestral connection between *Eusthenopteron* and *Ichthyostega*, for example—the great hinge between the fish and the amphibia—turning on the interpretation of small grooves within *Eusthenopteron*'s intercalary bones. Most species enter the evolutionary order fully formed and then depart unchanged. Where there should be evolution, there is *stasis* instead—the term is used by the paleontologists Stephen Jay Gould and Niles Eldredge in developing their theory of "punctuated equilibria"—with the fire alarms of change going off suddenly during a long night in which nothing happens.

The fundamental core of Darwinian doctrine, the philosopher Daniel Dennett has buoyantly affirmed, "is no longer in dispute among scientists." Such is the party line, useful on those occasions when biologists must present a single face to their public. But it was to the dead that Darwin pointed for confirmation of his theory; the fact that paleontology does not entirely support his doctrine has been a secret of long standing among paleontologists. "The known fossil record," Steven Stanley observes, "fails to document a single example of phyletic evolution accomplishing a major morphologic transition and hence offers no evidence that the gradualistic model can be valid."

Small wonder, then, that when the spotlight of publicity is dimmed, evolutionary biologists evince a feral streak, Stephen Jay Gould, Niles Eldredge, Richard Dawkins, and John Maynard Smith abusing one another roundly like wrestlers grappling in the dark.

Pause for the Logician

SWIMMING IN the soundless sea, the shark has survived for millions of years, sleek as a knife blade and twice as dull. *The shark is an organism wonderfully adapted to its environment.* Pause. And then the bright brittle voice of logical folly intrudes: *after all, it has survived for millions of years.*

This exchange should be deeply embarrassing to evolutionary biologists. And yet, time and again, biologists do explain the survival of an organism by reference to its fitness and the fitness of an organism by reference to its survival, the friction between concepts kindling nothing more illuminating than the observation that some creatures have been around for a very long time. "Those individuals that have the most offspring," writes Ernst Mayr, the distinguished zoologist, "are by definition . . . the fittest ones." And in *Evolution and the Myth of Creationism*, Tim Berra states that "[f]itness in the Darwinian sense means reproductive fitness—leaving at least enough offspring to spread or sustain the species in nature."

This is not a parody of evolutionary thinking; it *is* evolutionary thinking. *Que sera, sera.*

Evolutionary thought is suffused in general with an unwholesome glow. "The belief that an organ so perfect as the eye," Darwin wrote, "could have been formed by natural selection is enough to stagger anyone." It is. The problem is obvious. "What good," Stephen Jay Gould asked dramatically, "is 5 percent of an eye?" He termed this question "excellent."

The question, retorted the Oxford professor Richard Dawkins, the most prominent representative of ultra-Darwinians, "is not excellent at all":

> Vision that is 5 percent as good as yours or mine is very much worth having in comparison with no vision at all. And 6 percent is better than 5, 7 percent better than 6, and so on up the gradual, continuous series.

But Dawkins, replied Philip Johnson in turn, had carelessly assumed that 5 percent *of* an eye would see 5 percent as well *as* an eye, and that is an assumption for which there is little evidence. (A professor of law at the University of California at Berkeley, Johnson has a gift for appealing to the evidence when his opponents invoke theory, and vice versa.)

Having been conducted for more than a century, exchanges of this sort may continue for cen-

[1] A.S. Romer's *Vertebrate Paleontology* (University of Chicago Press, third edition, 1966) may be consulted with profit.

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turies more; but the debate is an exercise in irrelevance. What is at work in sight is a visual *system*, one that involves not only the anatomical structures of the eye and forebrain, but the remarkably detailed and poorly understood algorithms required to make these structures work. "When we examine the visual mechanism closely," Karen K. de Valois remarked recently in *Science*, "although we understand much about its component parts, we fail to fathom the ways in which they fit together to produce the whole of our complex visual perception."

These facts suggest a chastening reformulation of Gould's "excellent" question, one adapted to reality: *could a system we do not completely understand be constructed by means of a process we cannot completely specify*?

The intellectually responsible answer to *this* question is that we do not know—we have no way of knowing. But that is not the answer evolutionary theorists accept. According to Daniel Dennett (in *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*), Dawkins is "almost certainly right" to uphold the incremental view, because "Darwinism is basically on the right track." In this, he echoes the philosopher Kim Sterenly, who is also persuaded that "something like Dawkins's stories have *got* to be right" (emphasis added). After all, she asserts, "natural selection is the only possible explanation of complex adaptation."

Dawkins himself has maintained that those who do not believe a complex biological structure may be constructed in small steps are expressing merely their own sense of "personal incredulity." But in countering their animadversions he appeals to his own ability to believe almost anything. Commenting on the (very plausible) claim that spiders could not have acquired their web-spinning behavior by a Darwinian mechanism, Dawkins writes: "It is not impossible at all. That is what I firmly believe and I have some experience of spiders and their webs." It is painful to see this advanced as an argument.

Unflagging Success

Darwin conceived of evolution in terms of *small* variations among organisms, variations which by a process of accretion allow one species to change continuously into another. This suggests a view in which living creatures are spread out smoothly over the great manifold of biological possibilities, like colors merging imperceptibly in a color chart.

Life, however, is absolutely nothing like this. Wherever one looks there is singularity, quirkiness, oddness, defiant individuality, and just plain weirdness. The male redback spider (*Latrodectus hasselti*), for example, is often consumed during copulation. Such is sexual cannibalism—the result, biologists have long assumed, of "predatory females overcoming the defenses of weaker males." But it now appears that among *Latrodectus hasselti*, the male is complicit in his own consumption. Having achieved intromission, this schnook performs a characteristic somersault, placing his abdomen directly over his partner's mouth. Such is sexual suicide—awfulness taken to a higher power.[2]

It might seem that sexual suicide confers no advantage on the spider, the male passing from ecstasy to extinction in the course of one and the same act. But spiders willing to pay for love are apparently favored by female spiders (no surprise, there); and female spiders with whom they mate, entomologists claim, are less likely to mate again. The male spider perishes; his preposterous line persists.

This explanation resolves one question only at the cost of inviting another: why such bizarre behavior? In no other *Latrodectus* species does the male perform that obliging somersault, offering his partner the oblation of his life as well as his love. Are there general principles that specify sexual suicide among this species, but that forbid sexual suicide elsewhere? If so, what are they?

Once asked, such questions tend to multiply like party guests. If evolutionary theory cannot answer them, what, then, is its use? Why is the Pitcher plant carnivorous, but not the thorn bush, and why does the Pacific salmon require fresh water to spawn, but not the Chilean sea bass? Why has the British thrush learned to hammer snails upon rocks, but not the British blackbird, which often starves to death in the midst of plenty? Why did the firefly discover bioluminescence, but not the wasp or the warrior ant; why do the bees do their dance, but not the spider or the flies; and why are women, but not cats, born without the sleek tails that would make them even more alluring than they already are?

Why? Yes, *why*? The question, simple, clear, intellectually respectable, was put to the Nobel laureate George Wald. "Various organisms try various things," he finally answered, his words functioning as a verbal shrug, "they keep what works and discard the rest."

But suppose the manifold of life were to be given a good solid yank, so that the Chilean sea

[2] The details have been reported in the *New York Times* and in *Science*: evidence that at least some entomologists have a good deal of time on their hands.

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bass but not the Pacific salmon required fresh water to spawn, or that ants but not fireflies flickered enticingly at twilight, or that women but not cats were born with lush tails. What then? An inversion of life's fundamental facts would, I suspect, present evolutionary biologists with few difficulties. *Various organisms try various things.* This idea is adapted to any contingency whatsoever, an interesting example of a Darwinian mechanism in the development of Darwinian thought itself.

A comparison with geology is instructive. No geological theory makes it possible to specify precisely a particular mountain's shape; but the underlying process of upthrust and crumbling is well understood, and geologists can specify something like a mountain's *generic* shape. This provides geological theory with a firm connection to reality. A mountain arranging itself in the shape of the letter "A" is not a physically possible object; it is excluded by geological theory.

The theory of evolution, by contrast, is incapable of ruling *anything* out of court. That job must be done by nature. But a theory that can confront any contingency with unflagging success cannot be falsified. Its control of the facts is an illusion.

Sheer Dumb Luck

"CHANCE ALONE," the Nobel Prize-winning chemist Jacques Monod once wrote, "is at the source of every innovation, of all creation in the biosphere. Pure chance, absolutely free but blind, is at the very root of the stupendous edifice of creation."

The sentiment expressed by these words has come to vex evolutionary biologists. "This belief," Richard Dawkins writes, "that Darwinian evolution is 'random,' is not merely false. It is the exact opposite of the truth." But Monod is right and Dawkins wrong. Chance lies at the beating heart of evolutionary theory, just as it lies at the beating heart of thermodynamics.

It is the second law of thermodynamics that holds dominion over the temporal organization of the universe, and what the law has to say we find verified by ordinary experience at every turn. Things fall apart. Energy, like talent, tends to squander itself. Liquids go from hot to lukewarm. And so does love. Disorder and despair overwhelm the human enterprise, filling our rooms and our lives with clutter. Decay is unyielding. Things go from bad to worse. And overall, they go *only* from bad to worse.

These grim certainties the second law abbreviates in the solemn and awful declaration that the entropy of the universe is tending toward a maximum. The final state in which entropy is maximized is simply more *likely* than any other state. The disintegration of my face reflects nothing more compelling than the odds. Sheer dumb luck.

But if things fall apart, they also come together. *Life* appears to offer at least a temporary rebuke to the second law of thermodynamics. Although biologists are unanimous in arguing that evolution has no goal, fixed from the first, it remains true nonetheless that living creatures have organized themselves into ever more elaborate and flexible structures. If their complexity is increasing, the entropy that surrounds them is decreasing. Whatever the universe-as-a-whole may be doing—time fusing incomprehensibly with space, the great stars exploding indignantly—*biologically* things have gone from bad to *better*, the show organized, or so it would seem, as a counterexample to the prevailing winds of fate.

How so? The question has historically been the pivot on which the assumption of religious belief has turned. How so? "God said: 'Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let fowl fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.'" That is how so. And who on the basis of experience would be inclined to disagree? The structures of life are complex, and complex structures get made in this, the purely human world, only by a process of deliberate design. An act of intelligence is required to bring even a thimble into being; why should the artifacts of life be different?

Darwin's theory of evolution rejects this counsel of experience and intuition. Instead, the theory forges, at least in spirit, a perverse connection with the second law itself, arguing that precisely the same force that explains one turn of the cosmic wheel explains another: sheer dumb luck.

If the universe is for reasons of sheer dumb luck committed ultimately to a state of cosmic listlessness, it is *also* by sheer dumb luck that life first emerged on earth, the chemicals in the pre-biotic seas or soup illuminated and then invigorated by a fateful flash of lightning. It is again by sheer dumb luck that the first self-reproducing systems were created. The dense and ropy chains of RNA—*they* were created by sheer dumb luck, and sheer dumb luck drove the primitive chemicals of life to form a living cell. It is sheer dumb luck that alters the genetic message so that, from infernal nonsense, meaning for a moment emerges; and sheer dumb

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luck again that endows life with its *opportunities*, the space of possibilities over which natural selection plays, sheer dumb luck creating the mammalian eye and the marsupial pouch, sheer dumb luck again endowing the elephant's sensitive nose with nerves and the orchid's translucent petal with blush.

Amazing. *Sheer dumb luck.*

Life, Complex Life

Physicists are persuaded that things are in the end simple; biologists that they are not. A good deal depends on where one looks. Wherever the biologist looks, there is complexity beyond complexity, the entanglement of things ramifying downward from the organism to the cell. In a superbly elaborated figure, the Australian biologist Michael Denton compares a single cell to an immense automated factory, one the size of a large city:

> On the surface of the cell we would see millions of openings, like the portholes of a vast space ship, opening and closing to allow a continual stream of materials to flow in and out. If we were to enter one of these openings we would find ourselves in a world of supreme technology and bewildering complexity. We would see endless highly organized corridors and conduits branching in every direction away from the perimeter of the cell, some leading to the central memory bank in the nucleus and others to assembly plants and processing units. The nucleus itself would be a vast spherical chamber more than a kilometer in diameter, resembling a geodesic dome inside of which we would see, all neatly stacked together in ordered arrays, the miles of coiled chains of the DNA molecule. . . . We would notice that the simplest of the functional components of the cell, the protein molecules, were, astonishingly, complex pieces of molecular machinery. . . . Yet the life of the cell depends on the integrated activities of thousands, certainly tens, and probably hundreds of thousands of different protein molecules.

And whatever the complexity of the cell, it is insignificant in comparison with the mammalian nervous system; and beyond that, far impossibly ahead, there is the human mind, an instrument like no other in the biological world, conscious, flexible, penetrating, inscrutable, and profound.

It is here that the door of doubt begins to swing. *Chance* and *complexity* are countervailing forces; they work at cross-purposes. This circumstance the English theologian William Paley (1743-1805) made the gravamen of his well-known argument from design:

> Nor would any man in his senses think the existence of the watch, with its various machinery, accounted for, by being told that it was one out of possible combinations of material forms; that whatever he had found in the place where he found the watch, must have contained some internal configuration or other, and that this configuration might be the structure now exhibited, viz., of the works of a watch, as well as a different structure.

It is worth remarking, it is simply a *fact*, that this courtly and old-fashioned argument is entirely compelling. We *never* attribute the existence of a complex artifact to chance. And for obvious reasons: complex objects are useful islands, isolated amid an archipelago of useless possibilities. Of the thousands of ways in which a watch might be assembled from its constituents, only one is liable to work. It is unreasonable to attribute the existence of a watch to chance, if only because it is *unlikely*. An artifact is the overflow in matter of the mental motions of intention, deliberate design, planning, and coordination. The inferential spool runs backward, and it runs irresistibly from a complex object to the contrived, the artificial, circumstances that brought it into being.

Paley allowed the conclusion of his argument to drift from man-made to biological artifacts, a human eye or kidney falling under the same classification as a watch. "Every indication of contrivance," he wrote, "every manifestation of design, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater or more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation."

In this drifting, Darwinists see dangerous signs of a non sequitur. There *is* a tight connection, they acknowledge, between what a watch is and how it is made; but the connection unravels at the human eye—or any other organ, disposition, body plan, or strategy—if only because another and a simpler explanation is available. Among living creatures, say Darwinists, *the design persists even as the designer disappears*.

"Paley's argument," Dawkins writes, "is made with passionate sincerity and is informed by the best biological scholarship of his day, but it is wrong, gloriously and utterly wrong."

The enormous confidence this quotation expresses must be juxtaposed against the weight of intuition it displaces. It is true that intuition is often wrong—quantum theory is intuition's grave-

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yard. But quantum theory is remote from experience; our intuitions in biology lie closer to the bone. We are ourselves such stuff as genes are made on, and while this does not establish that our assessments of time and chance must be correct, it does suggest that they may be pertinent.

The Book of Life

THE DISCOVERY of DNA by James D. Watson and Francis Crick in 1952 revealed that a living creature is an organization of matter orchestrated by a genetic text. Within the bacterial cell, for example, the book of life is written in a distinctive language. The book is read aloud, its message specifying the construction of the cell's constituents, and then the book is copied, passed faithfully into the future.

This striking metaphor introduces a troubling instability, a kind of tremor, into biological thought. With the discovery of the genetic code, every living creature comes to divide itself into alien realms: the alphabetic and the organismic. The realms are conceptually distinct, responding to entirely different imperatives and constraints. An alphabet, on the one hand, belongs to the class of finite combinatorial objects, things that are discrete and that fit together in highly circumscribed ways. An organism, on the other hand, traces a continuous figure in space and in time. How, then, are these realms coordinated?

I ask the question because in similar systems, coordination is crucial. When I use the English language, the rules of grammar act as a constraint on the changes that I might make to the letters or sounds I employ. This is something we take for granted, an ordinary miracle in which I pass from one sentence to the next, almost as if crossing an abyss by means of a series of well-placed stepping stones.

In living creatures, things evidently proceed otherwise. There is *no* obvious coordination between alphabet and organism; the two objects are governed by different conceptual regimes, and that apparently is the end of it. Under the pressures of competition, the orchid *Orphrys apifera* undergoes a statistically adapted drift, some incidental feature in its design becoming over time ever more refined, until, consumed with longing, a misguided bee amorously mounts the orchid's very petals, convinced that he has seen shimmering there a female's fragile genitalia. As this is taking place, the marvelous mimetic design maturing slowly, the orchid's underlying alphabetic system undergoes a series of *random* perturbations, letters in its genetic alphabet winking off or winking on in a way utterly independent of the grand convergent progression toward perfection taking place out there where the action is.

We do not understand, we cannot re-create, a system of this sort. However it may operate in life, randomness in language is the enemy of order, a way of annihilating meaning. And not only in language, but in any language-*like* system—computer programs, for example. The alien influence of randomness in such systems was first noted by the distinguished French mathematician M.P. Schützenberger, who also marked the significance of this circumstance for evolutionary theory. "If we try to simulate such a situation," he wrote, "by making changes randomly . . . on computer programs, we find that we have no chance . . . even to see what the modified program would compute; it just jams."[3]

Planets of Possibility

THIS IS not yet an argument, only an expression of intellectual unease; but the unease tends to build as analogies are amplified. The general issue is one of size and space, and the way in which something small may be found amidst something very big.

Linguists in the 1950's, most notably Noam Chomsky and George Miller, asked dramatically how many grammatical English sentences could be constructed with 100 letters. Approximately 10 to the 25th power (10^{25}), they answered. This is a very large number. But a sentence is one thing; a *sequence*, another. A sentence obeys the laws of English grammar; a sequence is lawless and comprises *any* concatenation of those 100 letters. If there are roughly (10^{25}) sentences at hand, the number of sequences 100 letters in length is, by way of contrast, 26 to the 100th power (26^{100}). This is an inconceivably greater number. The space of possibilities has blown up, the explosive process being one of *combinatorial inflation*.

Now, the vast majority of sequences drawn on a finite alphabet fail to make a statement: they consist of letters arranged to no point or purpose. It is the contrast between sentences and sequences that

[3] Schützenberger's comments were made at a symposium held in 1966. The proceedings were edited by Paul S. Moorhead and Martin Kaplan and published as *Mathematical Challenges to the Neo-Darwinian Interpretation of Evolution* (Wistar Institute Press, 1967). Schützenberger's remarks, together with those of the physicist Murray Eden at the same symposium, constituted the first significant criticism of evolutionary doctrine in recent decades.

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carries the full, critical weight of memory and intuition. Organized as a writhing ball, the sequences resemble a planet-sized object, one as large as pale Pluto. Landing almost anywhere on that planet, linguists see nothing but nonsense. Meaning resides with the *grammatical* sequences, but they, those *sentences*, occupy an area no larger than a dime.

How on earth could the sentences be *discovered by chance* amid such an infernal and hyperborean immensity of gibberish? They cannot be discovered by chance, and, of course, chance plays no role in their discovery. The linguist or the native English-speaker moves around the place or planet with a perfectly secure sense of where he should go, and what he is apt to see.

The eerie and unexpected presence of an alphabet in every living creature might suggest the possibility of a similar argument in biology. It is DNA, of course, that acts as life's primordial text, the code itself organized in nucleic triplets, like messages in Morse code. Each triplet is matched to a particular chemical object, an amino acid. There are twenty such acids in all. They correspond to letters in an alphabet. As the code is read somewhere in life's hidden housing, the linear order of the nucleic acids induces a corresponding linear order in the amino acids. The biological finger writes, and what the cell reads is an ordered presentation of such amino acids—a protein.

Like the nucleic acids, proteins are alphabetic objects, composed of discrete constituents. On average, proteins are roughly 250 amino acid residues in length, so a given protein may be imagined as a long biochemical word, one of many.

The aspects of an analogy are now in place. What is needed is a relevant contrast, something comparable to sentences and sequences in language. Of course nothing completely comparable is at hand: there are *no* sentences in molecular biology. Nonetheless, there is this fact, helpfully recounted by Richard Dawkins: "The actual animals that have ever lived on earth are a tiny subset of the theoretical animals that *could* exist." It follows that over the course of four billion years, life has expressed itself by means of a particular stock of proteins, a certain set of life-like words.

A COMBINATORIAL COUNT is now possible. The MIT physicist Murray Eden, to whom I owe this argument, estimates the number of the viable proteins at 10 to the 50th power (10^{50}). Within this set is the raw material of everything that has ever lived: the flowering plants and the alien insects and the seagoing turtles and the sad shambling dinosaurs, the great evolutionary successes and the great evolutionary failures as well. These creatures are, quite literally, composed of the proteins that over the course of time have performed some useful function, with "usefulness" now standing for the sense of sentencehood in linguistics.

As in the case of language, what has once lived occupies some corner in the space of a larger array of possibilities, the actual residing in the shadow of the possible. The space of all *possible* proteins of a fixed length (250 residues, recall) is computed by multiplying 20 by itself 250 times (20^{250}). It is idle to carry out the calculation. The number is larger by far than seconds in the history of the world since the Big Bang or grains of sand on the shores of every sounding sea. Another planet now looms in the night sky, Pluto-sized or bigger, a conceptual companion to the planet containing every sequence composed by endlessly arranging the 26 English letters into sequences 100 letters in length. This planetary *doppelgänger* is the planet of all possible proteins of fixed length, the planet, in a certain sense, of every *conceivable* form of carbon-based life.

And there the two planets lie, spinning on their soundless axes. The contrast between sentences and sequences on Pluto reappears on Pluto's double as the contrast between useful protein forms and all the rest; and it reappears in terms of the same dramatic difference in numbers, the enormous (20^{250}) overawing the merely big (10^{50}), the contrast between the two being quite literally between an immense and swollen planet and a dime's worth of area. That dime-sized corner, which on Pluto contains the English sentences, on Pluto's double contains the living creatures; and there the biologist may be seen tramping, the warm puddle of wet life achingly distinct amid the planet's snow and stray proteins. It is here that living creatures, whatever their ultimate fate, breathed and moaned and carried on, life evidently having discovered the small quiet corner of the space of possibilities in which things *work*.

It would seem that evolution, Murray Eden writes in artfully ambiguous language, "was directed toward the incredibly small proportion of useful protein forms. . . ," the word "directed" conveying, at least to me, the sobering image of a stage-managed search, with evolution bypassing the awful immensity of all that frozen space because in some sense evolution *knew* where it was going.

And yet, from the perspective of Darwinian the-

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ory, it is chance that plays the crucial—that plays the *only*—role in generating the proteins. Wandering the surface of a planet, evolution wanders blindly, having forgotten where it has been, unsure of where it is going.

The Artificer of Design

RANDOM MUTATIONS are the great creative demiurge of evolution, throwing up possibilities and bathing life in the bright light of chance. Each living creature is not only what it is but what it might be. What, then, acts to make the possible palpable?

The theory of evolution is a materialistic theory. Various deities need not apply. Any form of mind is out. Yet a force is needed, something adequate to the manifest complexity of the biological world, and something that in the largest arena of all might substitute for the acts of design, anticipation, and memory that are obvious features of such day-to-day activities as fashioning a sentence or a sonnet.

This need is met in evolutionary theory by natural selection, the filter but not the source of change. "It may be said," Darwin wrote,

> that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinizing, throughout the world, every variation, even the slightest; rejecting that which is bad, preserving and adding up all that is good: silently and insensibly working, whenever and wherever opportunity offers, as the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life.

Natural selection emerges from these reflections as a strange force-like concept. It is strange because it is unconnected to any notion of force in physics, and it is force-*like* because natural selection *does* something, it has an effect and so functions as a kind of cause.[4] Creatures, habits, organ systems, body plans, organs, and tissues are *shaped* by natural selection. Population geneticists write of selection forces, selection pressures, and coefficients of natural selection; biologists say that natural selection sculpts, shapes, coordinates, transforms, directs, controls, changes, and transfigures living creatures.

It is natural selection, Richard Dawkins believes, that is the artificer of design, a cunning force that mocks human ingenuity even as it mimics it:

> Charles Darwin showed how it is possible for blind physical forces to mimic the effects of conscious design, and, by operating as a cumulative filter of chance variations, to lead eventually to organized and adaptive complexity, to mosquitoes and mammoths, to humans and therefore, indirectly, to books and computers.

In affirming what Darwin showed, these words suggest that Darwin *demonstrated* the power of natural selection in some formal sense, settling the issue once and for all. But that is simply not true. When Darwin wrote, the mechanism of evolution that he proposed had only life itself to commend it. But to refer to the power of natural selection by appealing to the course of evolution is a little like confirming a story in the *New York Times* by reading it twice. The theory of evolution is, after all, a *general* theory of change; if natural selection can sift the debris of chance to fashion an elephant's trunk, should it not be able to work elsewhere—amid computer programs and algorithms, words and sentences? Skeptics require a demonstration of natural selection's cunning, one that does not involve the very phenomenon it is meant to explain.

No sooner said than done. An extensive literature is now devoted to what is optimistically called artificial life. These are schemes in which a variety of programs generate amusing computer objects and by a process said to be similar to evolution show that they are capable of growth and decay and even a phosphorescent simulacrum of death. An algorithm called "Face Prints," for example, has been designed to enable crime victims to identify their attackers. The algorithm runs through hundreds of facial combinations (long hair, short hair, big nose, wide chin, moles, warts, wens, wrinkles) until the indignant victim spots the resemblance between the long-haired, big-nosed, wide-chinned portrait of the perpetrator and the perpetrator himself.

It is the presence of the *human* victim in this scenario that should give pause. What is *he* doing there, complaining loudly amid those otherwise blind forces? A mechanism that requires a discerning human agent cannot be Darwinian. The Darwinian mechanism neither anticipates nor remembers. It gives no directions and makes no choices. What is unacceptable in evolutionary theory, what is strictly forbidden, is the appearance of a force with the power to survey time, a force that con-

[4] Murray Eden is, as usual, perceptive: "It is as if," he writes, "some pre-Newtonian cosmologist had proposed a theory of planetary motion which supposed that a natural force of unknown origin held the planets in their courses. The supposition is right enough and the idea of a force between two celestial bodies is a very useful one, but it is hardly a theory."

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serves a point or a property because it *will* be useful. Such a force is no longer Darwinian. How would a blind force know such a thing? And by what means could future usefulness be transmitted to the present?

If life is, as evolutionary biologists so often say, a matter merely of blind thrusting and throbbing, any definition of natural selection must plainly meet what I have elsewhere called a rule against deferred success.[5] It is a rule that cannot be violated with impunity; if evolutionary theory is to retain its intellectual integrity, it cannot be violated at all.

But the rule is widely violated, the violations so frequent as to amount to a formal fallacy.

Advent of the Head Monkey

It is Richard Dawkins's grand intention in *The Blind Watchmaker* to demonstrate, as one reviewer enthusiastically remarked, "how natural selection allows biologists to dispense with such notions as purpose and design." This he does by exhibiting a process in which the random exploration of certain possibilities, a *blind* stab here, another there, is followed by the filtering effects of natural selection, some of those stabs saved, others discarded. But could a process so conceived—a *Darwinian* process—discover a simple English sentence: a target, say, chosen from Shakespeare? The question is by no means academic. If natural selection cannot discern a simple English sentence, what chance is there that it might have discovered the mammalian eye or the system by which glucose is regulated by the liver?

A thought experiment in *The Blind Watchmaker* now follows. Randomness in the experiment is conveyed by the metaphor of the monkeys, perennial favorites in the theory of probability. There they sit, simian hands curved over the keyboards of a thousand typewriters, their long agile fingers striking keys at random. It is an image of some poignancy, those otherwise intelligent apes banging away at a machine they cannot fathom; and what makes the poignancy pointed is the fact that the system of rewards by which the apes have been induced to strike the typewriter's keys is from the first rigged against them.

The probability that a monkey will strike a given letter is one in 26. The typewriter has 26 keys: the monkey, one working finger. But a letter is not a word. Should Dawkins demand that the monkey get two English letters right, the odds against success rise with terrible inexorability from one in 26 to one in 676. The Shakespearean target chosen by Dawkins—"Methinks it is like a weasel"—is a six-word sentence containing 28 English letters (including the spaces). It occupies an isolated point in a space of 10,000 million, million, million, million, million, million possibilities.

This is a very large number; combinatorial inflation is at work. And these are very long odds. And a six-word sentence consisting of 28 English letters is a very short, very simple English sentence.

Such are the fatal facts. The problem confronting the monkeys is, of course, a double one: they must, to be sure, find the right letters, but they cannot *lose* the right letters once they have found them. A random search in a space of this size is an exercise in irrelevance. This is something the monkeys appear to know.

What more, then, is expected; what more required? *Cumulative* selection, Dawkins argues—the answer offered as well by Stephen Jay Gould, Manfred Eigen, and Daniel Dennett. The experiment now proceeds in stages. The monkeys type randomly. After a time, they are allowed to survey what they have typed in order to choose the result "which *however slightly* most resembles the target phrase." It is a computer that in Dawkins's experiment performs the crucial assessments, but I prefer to imagine its role assigned to a scrutinizing monkey—the Head Monkey of the experiment. The process under way is one in which stray successes are spotted and then saved. This process is iterated and iterated again. Variations close to the target are conserved *because* they are close to the target, the Head Monkey equably surveying the scene until, with the appearance of a miracle in progress, randomly derived sentences do begin to converge on the target sentence itself.

The contrast between schemes and scenarios is striking. Acting on their own, the monkeys are adrift in fathomless possibilities, any accidental success—a pair of English-like letters—lost at once, those successes seeming like faint untraceable lights flickering over a wine-dark sea. The advent of the Head Monkey changes things entirely. Successes are *conserved* and then conserved again. The light that formerly flickered uncertainly now stays lit, a beacon burning steadily, a point of illumination. By the light of that light, other lights are lit, until the isolated successes converge, bringing order out of nothingness.

The entire exercise is, however, an achievement in self-deception. A *target* phrase? Iterations that *most resemble* the target? A Head Monkey that *mea-*

[5] *Black Mischief: Language, Life, Logic & Luck* (1986).

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sures the distance between failure and success? If things are sightless, how is the target represented, and how is the distance between randomly generated phrases and the targets assessed? And by whom? And the Head Monkey? What of him? The mechanism of deliberate design, purged by Darwinian theory on the level of the organism, has reappeared in the description of natural selection itself, a vivid example of what Freud meant by the return of the repressed.

This is a point that Dawkins accepts without quite acknowledging, rather like a man adroitly separating his doctor's diagnosis from his own disease.[6] Nature presents life with no targets. Life shambles forward, surging here, shuffling there, the small advantages accumulating *on their own* until something novel appears on the broad evolutionary screen—an arch or an eye, an intricate pattern of behavior, the complexity characteristic of life. May we, then, see *this* process at work, by seeing it simulated? "Unfortunately," Dawkins writes, "I think it may be beyond my powers as a programmer to set up such a counterfeit world."[7]

This is the authentic voice of contemporary Darwinian theory. What may be illustrated by the theory does not involve a Darwinian mechanism; what involves a Darwinian mechanism cannot be illustrated by the theory.

Darwin Without Darwinism

BIOLOGISTS OFTEN affirm that as members of the scientific community they positively welcome criticism. Nonsense. Like everyone else, biologists loathe criticism and arrange their lives so as to avoid it. Criticism has nonetheless seeped into their souls, the process of doubt a curiously Darwinian one in which individual biologists entertain minor reservations about their theory without ever recognizing the degree to which these doubts mount up to a substantial deficit. Creationism, so often the target of their indignation, is the least of their worries.

For many years, biologists have succeeded in keeping skepticism on the circumference of evolutionary thought, where paleontologists, taxonomists, and philosophers linger. But the burning fringe of criticism is now contracting, coming ever closer to the heart of Darwin's doctrine. In a paper of historic importance, Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Lewontin expressed their dissatisfaction with what they termed "just-so" stories in biology.[8] It is by means of a just-so story, for example, that the pop biologist Elaine Morgan explains the presence in human beings of an aquatic diving reflex. An obscure primate ancestral to man, Morgan argues, was actually aquatic, having returned to the sea like the dolphin. Some time later, that primate, having tired of the water, clambered back to land, his aquatic adaptations intact. Just so.

If stories of this sort are intellectually inadequate—preposterous, in fact—some biologists are prepared to argue that they are unnecessary as well, another matter entirely. "How seriously," H. Allen Orr asked in a superb if savage review of Dennett's *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*,

> should we take these endless adaptive explanations of features whose alleged Design may be illusory? Isn't there a difference between those cases where we recognize Design *before* we understand its precise significance and those cases where we try to make Design manifest *by* concocting a story? And isn't it especially worrisome that we can make up arbitrary traits faster than adaptive stories, and adaptive stories faster than experimental tests?

The camel's lowly hump and the elephant's nose—*these*, Orr suggests, may well be adaptive and so designed by natural selection. But beyond the old familiar cases, life may not be designed at all, the weight of evolution borne by neutral mutations, with genes undergoing a slow but pointless drifting in time's soft currents.

Like Orr, many biologists see an acknowledgment of their doubts as a cagey, a *calculated*, concession; but cagey or not, it is a concession devastating to the larger project of Darwinian biology. Unable to say *what* evolution has accomplished, biologists now find themselves unable to say *whether* evolution has accomplished it. This leaves evolutionary theory in the doubly damned position of having compromised the concepts needed to make sense of life—complexity, adaptation, design—while simultaneously conceding that the theory does little to explain them.

[6] The same pattern of intellectual displacement is especially vivid in Daniel Dennett's description of natural selection as a force subordinate to what he calls "the principle of the accumulation of design." Sifting through the debris of chance, natural selection, he writes, occupies itself by "thriftily conserving the design work . . . accomplished at each stage." But there is *no* such principle. Dennett has simply assumed that a sequence of conserved advantages will converge to an improvement in design; the assumption expresses a non sequitur.

[7] It is absurdly easy to set up a sentence-searching algorithm obeying purely Darwinian constraints. The result, however, is always the same—gibberish.

[8] "The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm: A Critique of the Adaptationist Programme," *Proceedings of the Royal Society*, Volume B 205 (1979).

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No doubt, the theory of evolution will continue to play the singular role in the life of our secular culture that it has always played. The theory is unique among scientific instruments in being cherished not for what it contains, but for what it lacks. There are in Darwin's scheme no biotic laws, no *Bauplan* as in German natural philosophy, no special creation, no *élan vital*, no divine guidance or transcendental forces. The theory functions simply as a description of matter in one of its modes, and living creatures are said to be something that the gods of law indifferently sanction and allow.

"Darwin," Richard Dawkins has remarked with evident gratitude, "made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist." This is an exaggeration, of course, but one containing a portion of the truth. That Darwin's theory of evolution and biblical accounts of creation play similar roles in the human economy of belief is an irony appreciated by altogether too few biologists.

On the Derivation of *Ulysses* from *Don Quixote*

I imagine this story being told to me by Jorge Luis Borges one evening in a Buenos Aires café.

His voice dry and infinitely ironic, the aging, nearly blind literary master observes that "the *Ulysses*," mistakenly attributed to the Irishman James Joyce, is in fact derived from "the *Quixote*."

I raise my eyebrows.

Borges pauses to sip discreetly at the bitter coffee our waiter has placed in front of him, guiding his hands to the saucer.

"The details of the remarkable series of events in question may be found at the University of Leiden," he says. "They were conveyed to me by the Freemason Alejandro Ferri in Montevideo."

Borges wipes his thin lips with a linen handkerchief that he has withdrawn from his breast pocket.

"As you know," he continues, "the original handwritten text of the *Quixote* was given to an order of French Cistercians in the autumn of 1576."

I hold up my hand to signify to our waiter that no further service is needed.

"Curiously enough, for none of the brothers could read Spanish, the Order was charged by the Papal Nuncio, Hoyo dos Monterrey (a man of great refinement and implacable will), with the responsibility for copying the *Quixote*, the printing press having then gained no currency in the wilderness of what is now known as the department of Auvergne. Unable to speak or read Spanish, a language they not unreasonably detested, the brothers copied the *Quixote* over and over again, re-creating the text but, of course, compromising it as well, and so inadvertently discovering the true nature of authorship. Thus they created Fernando Lor's *Los Hombres d'Estado* in 1585 by means of a singular series of copying errors, and then in 1654 Juan Luis Samorza's remarkable epistolary novel *Por Favor* by the same means, and then in 1685, the errors having accumulated sufficiently to change Spanish into French, Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, their copying continuous and indefatigable, the work handed down from generation to generation as a sacred but secret trust, so that in time the brothers of the monastery, known only to members of the Bourbon house and, rumor has it, the Englishman and psychic Conan Doyle, copied into creation Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, and then as a result of a particularly significant series of errors, in which French changed into Russian, Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and *Anna Karenina*. Late in the last decade of the 19th century there suddenly emerged, in English, Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and then the brothers, their numbers reduced by an infectious disease of mysterious origin, finally copied the *Ulysses* into creation in 1902, the manuscript lying neglected for almost thirteen years and then mysteriously making its way to Paris in 1915, just months before the British attack on the Somme, a circumstance whose significance remains to be determined."

I sit there, amazed at what Borges has recounted. "Is it your understanding, then," I ask, "that *every* novel in the West was created in this way?"

"Of course," replies Borges imperturbably. Then he adds: "Although every novel is derived directly from another novel, there is really only one novel, the *Quixote*."

— *D.B.*

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Russia's Past, Russia's Future

Richard Pipes

RUSSIA IN the last few years has been a great disappointment to those of us who, after the collapse of the Soviet regime, had expected the country to embark on a slow, probably uneven, but still irreversible course of Westernization. What we had in mind was the path followed, in various ways, by the Baltic states, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary, all of which had also been recently liberated from Communism. What we did not have in mind was what many Russians themselves, in the initial flush of post-Communist euphoria, envisioned: namely, that merely by declaring Russia democratic and market-oriented, they would, in a year or two, transform it into another United States.

In the event, neither scenario has materialized. After an auspicious beginning, Russia has ended up with a nondescript regime that is unable to provide its people either with the prosperity and freedom of capitalist democracy or with the rudimentary social security of mature Communism.

In Russia, this outcome has bred pervasive disillusionment. In the most recent parliamentary elections, the Communists won the largest number of seats. Nearly one-half of the electorate cast ballots for candidates who reject democratization and the market economy, who view the West as an enemy bent on subjugating Russia, and who yearn for a "firm hand." And now we face the prospect that in the June presidential elections, victory may go to a Communist or a nationalist, between whom there is little to distinguish since both wish to reconquer the lost empire and dismantle the country's fledgling democratic institutions.

These developments, unwelcome as they are to sympathetic observers, also reveal how very wrong were neo-Slavophiles like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn; for them, the whole problem in Russia lay in Marxism, which they saw as a virus brought from the West and lacking roots in Russia's own past. Yet while it is true that Marxist *theory* was imported from the West, it is no less true that Marxism in *practice*, as a system of government, acquired in Russia a uniquely despotic character. In Western countries, Marxism, once in power in the guise of social democracy, evolved into the democratic welfare state; in Russia, as in the majority of third-world countries that adopted Marxism, it produced totalitarianism.

Clearly, these two different fates of the same ideology suggest that Russia's political culture is inhospitable to the political as well as the economic institutions of the West, and prone to reshape Western ideas in a spirit hostile to the principles of civil society. Until Russians become aware of what they have to change in their own culture, it

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is unlikely they can become a "normal" society, a condition to which most of them aspire.

What, then, are the elements in their historical heritage that have inured Russians to Westernization and made them vulnerable to anti-Western demagoguery?

The explanation that comes most readily to mind is national character: the Russians are intrinsically distinct, a people cast from a different mold from Englishmen, Frenchmen, or Swedes. But this answer must be rejected. In the late Middle Ages, Russia consisted of two states. One was centered on Moscow, the other on Novgorod, a prosperous commercial city-state which, through the agency of the Hanseatic League, carried on extensive trade with Northern Europe. Its commercial culture encouraged the emergence of democratic institutions that paralleled and in some respects even surpassed those of the contemporary West.

Novgorod was a republic whose princes were elected and, before assuming office, had to swear an oath to uphold charters that strictly circumscribed their powers. Other chief officials, too, were elected. The property of citizens enjoyed protection from unlawful seizure. Laws were issued by a popular assembly, the *veche* (a counterpart of the Anglo-Saxon *folkmoot*), in which every freeman could participate. The Russian city-state closely resembled the self-governing communes of medieval Europe which contributed so much to the evolution of liberty and the rule of law in the West.

Unfortunately for Russia, in the late 15th century Novgorod was conquered by the autocratic Moscow state, which abolished the *veche*, confiscated all landed properties on behalf of the Muscovite czar, and deported its elite by the thousands to the interior of Russia. Still, although Novgorod did not survive into the modern era, its very existence demonstrates that Russians are not constitutionally averse to Westernization.

This is corroborated as well by modern Russian culture. Russia's great literature of the past two centuries, along with its music and art, has been strongly influenced by the West and, in turn, readily absorbed by the West. Surely no one would regard Pushkin, Turgenev, Tolstoy, or Chekhov, Tchaikowsky or Stravinsky, Kandinsky or Chagall as anything but Western.

We thus confront a conundrum: a country which borders on Europe, which is inhabited by people who physically resemble Europeans, which for the past three centuries has insisted on being regarded as part of Europe, and which has shown both in its political and in its cultural life the ability to be European, nevertheless has found it next to impossible to build a social and political regime that is based on the European model. Why should this be so?

Here, a brief digression is in order. In what follows, my assumption is that Western institutions and practices are the standard by which Russia (and, by extrapolation, other non-Western societies) should be judged. Such an assumption is quite unpopular these days, for it recalls the self-serving arguments used by Westerners at the height of their imperial expansion to justify the subjugation and even the enslavement of other races. The notion of the racial superiority of Europeans, especially Nordic Europeans ("Aryans"), which reached its infamous fulfillment in the Holocaust, has been thoroughly discredited, and rightly so. But in reaction, we have swung to the opposite extreme. In American colleges the politically-correct view today is that of "multiculturalism," a fuzzy neologism which treats all cultures as of equal merit—and Western culture as, if anything, inferior because of the unique devastation it has allegedly inflicted on humanity and the natural environment.

In atoning for the racist attitudes of the past, today's fashionable doctrine suffers from drawbacks of its own, not the least of which is hypocrisy. We have abandoned the notion that non-Europeans are savages, or in any way inferior to us, but we persist in judging other societies by our own, Western standards. When the Iranian head of state ordered faithful Muslims to kill a novelist for allegedly insulting Muhammad, our leading "progressive" writers were outraged, even though the order might well have been in keeping with Islamic law. We object to practices which relegate women in the third world to an inferior status and in some African societies to physical mutilation, even though, again, such practices conform to local cultural traditions. These and numerous other examples suggest that much of what passes for "multiculturalism," with its attendant denigration of the West, is a pose, inspired in part by guilt, in part by self-hatred.

Holding up Western culture as the model for the contemporary world does not, in fact, imply racial superiority. For various reasons, Europe was the first continent to develop the institutions which are the foundations of modern life—the legal systems and administrative practices, the science and technology, the means of information and trans-

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port, the movement of people, capital, and goods which, in combination, relentlessly integrate the world into a single community. Modernity and Westernization are, for all practical purposes, one and the same thing. A list of the countries enjoying the highest per-capita income today closely matches the roll of countries that have gone farthest in adopting Western ways. Conversely, the poorest countries are those which, for one reason or another, have not followed this path.

Russia is no exception to the rule. Its ingrained anti-Westernism attests to an inability to adjust to the modern world, and spells poverty and regression. The theory formulated by 19th-century Slavophiles—that Russia must follow its own "separate" path—has been amply demonstrated to be a recipe for disaster. This does not deter Gennadi Zyuganov, the head of Russia's Communist party and a leading contender in this year's presidential race, from demanding that the world acknowledge "our equal right to follow our own path in accordance with our traditions and conditions." But it is not clear concretely what this "own path" is—that is, exactly which "traditions" Russia should follow and which "conditions" it should adjust to—and in any case no one denies Russians this "right." The question, in light of the experience of the past 78 years, is where it is likely to lead.

WHY DOES Russia find it so difficult to adopt the Western model, even as several Asian countries, in every respect farther removed from Europe, have done so with great success? The explanation lies partly in subjective and partly in objective factors: in a psychologically rooted aversion, reinforced by the legacy of history.

Russia's persistent anti-Westernism is traceable, first and foremost, to its religious heritage. The depth of religious feeling in the Russian population at large has long been a matter of controversy, for Russian religiosity is to an uncommon degree permeated by superstition and magic. But it is indisputable that for hundreds of years the vast majority of the Russian people—and especially the peasantry, which made up 80 percent of the population—paid faithful obeisance to icons, scrupulously observed the church's fasts and holidays, and, when literate, read religious books. In many respects, therefore, until the Communist anti-religious campaign got into high gear in the 1930's, most Russians continued to live in the Middle Ages, untouched by the Western secular culture that was dominant among the educated elite.

Although it may not be immediately apparent, a close causal link exists between the religion which Russians profess and their attitude toward the West. In the eyes of Orthodox Christianity, both Catholicism and Protestantism have always been deviant religions, polluted by pagan classicism and philosophical rationalism. The strength of this view is evidenced by the fact that after the Turks had conquered Constantinople in 1453 and liquidated the Byzantine empire—the center of Christian Orthodoxy—Russian clergymen justified the calamity as divine punishment for Byzantium's attempt a century earlier to enter into a union with Rome. Following the collapse of Byzantium and the Ottoman occupation of the Balkan peninsula, Muscovite czardom remained, for all practical purposes, the world's only Orthodox Christian state. This meant that from the middle of the 15th century on, Orthodoxy became identified with Russianness, turning into a national religion.

This synthesis of religion and nationality—by contrast, Catholicism and Protestantism were, and remain to this day, transnational faiths—had far-reaching effects. The hostility of the Orthodox Church toward the Western branches of Christianity became in time secularized. Just as Orthodoxy deemed itself irreconcilable with Western Christianity, so the Russian nation came to perceive itself as incompatible with the West. But since Russians did not feel any affinity with those of their neighbors who professed Eastern creeds—Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism—they began to think of themselves as unique.

Historians have long noted how the Bolsheviks, for all their militant atheism, unwittingly played on these emotions in launching the Third International and proclaiming Moscow the capital of world Communism. In so doing, they were following in the footsteps of 16th-century Russian clerics who, after the fall of Constantinople, had proclaimed the country's capital the Third and ultimate "Rome."

In an age when science and ideology have replaced religion as intellectual and moral guides, it may seem far-fetched to seek roots of political attitudes in religious antecedents. But secularism is a very recent phenomenon, and many of our beliefs, even if couched in scientific and ideological terms, on closer scrutiny turn out to be rooted in religious faith. The millions of Russians who applaud demagogues denouncing the "corrupt" and "corrupting" West unknowingly replicate attitudes which originated centuries ago among the Orthodox hierarchy and from there spread to the population at large.

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IF THESE are some of the attitudes which inhibit Russians from benefiting from Western experience and modernization, there are also institutional obstacles impeding change—in fact, a bewildering variety of them. At their head, I would place the tardy and short-lived acquaintance with private property.

We in the West tend to treat the notion of private property as a law of nature, guaranteeing that the goods and rights which we possess are ours to keep and enjoy. We defend these goods and rights not only from our fellow-citizens but from the state as well: we firmly believe that the government must not tax us without the consent of our representatives or lay its hands on our property except with due compensation. In reality, though, it took a long time and many bitter conflicts for these "natural" and self-evident principles to establish themselves in our culture. The constitutional history of England, the country that gave the world parliamentary democracy, is filled with struggles between the people and the crown over the latter's encroachments, mainly through arbitrary taxation, on its subjects' properties.

These struggles ended in the triumph of popular sovereignty, in England and elsewhere. The notion that property included physical assets as well as life and liberty, popularized by John Locke and transplanted from England to the United States, exercised considerable influence on the continent as well. Throughout Europe, even in countries living under absolutist regimes, it was considered a truism that kings ruled but did not own: a popular formula taken from the Roman philosopher Seneca held that "unto kings belongs the power of all things, and unto individual men, property." Violations of this principle were perceived as a hallmark of tyranny.

This whole complex of ideas was foreign to Russia. The Muscovite crown treated the entire realm as its property and all secular landowners as the czar's tenants-in-chief, who held their estates at his mercy and on condition of faithful service. Sovereignty subsumed ownership of the land and its people. This kind of regime, designated "patrimonial" by the German sociologist Max Weber, survived intact in Russia to the end of the 18th century and in some respects until the beginning of the 20th. Unconditional private ownership of land, the main form of productive wealth, came only in 1785 with Catherine the Great's "Charter of the Nobility," and even then was confined to the gentry; peasants continued to cultivate the soil belonging either to the state or to the landlords. For the peasantry, ownership of land became a theoretical possibility only in 1861, and a realistic one only in 1906, that is, almost within living memory. Then, after a few decades, private possession of land was abolished by Stalin's collectivization measures.

The absence of private property in land has exerted a profound influence on every facet of Russia's history. In England, kings convened parliaments because custom forbade the imposition of direct taxes without their subjects' approval; the more money the crown needed, usually to cover the costs of ceaseless wars, the more authority it had to concede to the House of Commons. The great constitutional crisis of the 17th century, which resulted in the permanent shift of legislative power from the crown to the Commons, was essentially decided by the latter's control of the purse strings.

In Russia, by contrast, the czars had no need to convoke representative bodies because they owned everything. The so-called Land Assemblies, which some historians like to compare to Western parliaments, were nothing of the kind—they had no fiscal powers and merely endorsed decisions taken by the Kremlin. Czarist absolutism thus reigned supreme, taking on much more onerous forms than any of its Western counterparts which were effectively constrained by the existence of and respect for private property. It could maintain itself until the early 20th century in large measure because it was fiscally self-sufficient.

PROPERTY HAS played a role in history not only as a restraint on the exercise of political power. It is no less responsible for instituting the regime of law in place of the primitive rule of men. Property and law have always been closely linked: one of the defining qualities of ownership is the right to exclude others from unauthorized use of a person's assets. In the words of C. B. Macpherson, "What distinguishes property from mere momentary possession is that property is a claim that will be enforced by society or the state, by customs or convention or law." Thus property posits common or statutory law and all that goes with them. "Property and law are born together and must die together," wrote Jeremy Bentham nearly two centuries ago. "Before the laws there was no property; take away the laws, all property ceases."

The intimate relationship between these two institutions explains the remarkable role played by members of the legal profession in the politi-

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cal evolution of England and other English-speaking nations where property was most fully developed. From Sir John Fortescue in the 15th century onward, English jurists have been the supreme arbiters of their country's unwritten constitution. It is they who established the principle, central to modern democracy, that law is superior to both sovereign and subject.

No such evolution occurred in Russia. There, the absence of private property hindered the emergence of legal institutions: disputes over landed estates, which in England in the 17th century constituted the bulk of the cases tried by the courts, were resolved in Russia by administrative fiat. Suffice it to note that independent courts, and the legal profession to serve them, made their debut in Russia as late as 1864, the age of railroads and telegraphs. At no time in Russia's history were its jurists asked their opinions on the constitutionality of the government's actions. Suits between citizens and the state were unknown. Even in today's post-Communist Russia, attempts to bring the government to trial on charges of unconstitutional behavior have been singularly unsuccessful.

A word must be said in this connection about serfdom, not the least harmful legacy of patrimonialism. Bondage, of course, was known in Western Europe as well, but there it was a feature of feudalism and disappeared at the close of the Middle Ages. In Russia, which had no feudalism, it was a feature of absolutism, and emerged only at the dawn of the early modern era, in the 16th and 17th centuries; it was abolished in 1861. Since the crown required all Russian landlords to render personal service, primarily in the armed forces, and yet lacked money to compensate them with adequate salaries, it had to devise other means of supporting them. In a country rich in land but short of hands to cultivate it, this took the form of an assured labor force of peasants tied to the land.

Serfdom was thus a corollary of the gentry's compulsory state service. While not analogous to slavery, it shared some of slavery's worst features: the serf, too, lacked legal rights, including property rights. Not unlike slavery, serfdom inculcated in the peasant a contempt for law and property and a spirit of sullen resistance to all authority. What could the state mean to him when all it did was exact taxes and recruits, giving nothing in return? Serfdom further prevented the Russian peasant from developing a sense of patriotism, for how could he feel anything in common with either the officials or the landlords who treated him like chattel?

The most harmful legacy of Russia's past may well lie here. Its people were given no opportunity to develop either respect for property and law, or a sense of belonging to a national community. They were taught to obey when there was no choice and to rebel when there was: the one thing they were not taught was the responsibilities and the benefits of citizenship.

MAINTAINING THE most extreme forms of absolutism to the very dawn of the contemporary age, the Russian state rested not on a popular mandate but on force. Because of the highly inequitable distribution of civil rights among its subjects, it could not even appeal to national sentiments. Russia's impressive record of resistance to foreign invaders must not be confused with patriotism, for the driving motive here was loathing of foreigners rather than affinity with one's compatriots, and feelings tended to evaporate as soon as Russians were called upon to fight outside their borders.

A government that rests on force must, by the logic of its situation, give its people constant proof of its might. One of the ways to do this is by territorial acquisition. Others have built empires, but no country has expanded so relentlessly and held on so tenaciously to its conquests as has Russia. By my calculation, in the 150 years between the middle of the 16th century and the end of the 17th, the Muscovite state year after year acquired territory equivalent in area to modern-day Holland.

True, most of these territories consisted of barren wastes, but even so, their incorporation exerted a powerful influence on the psyche of Russians, enabling them to boast that even if they were not the richest or the most civilized country in the world, they were indisputably the largest. The poet Michael Lermontov, writing at the time Russian armies were conquering the Caucasus, has a Russian tell a Muslim native of the mountains that once he comes under the czar's rule he will proudly say, "Yes, I am a slave, but a slave of the czar of the universe."

Russia's expansionism and the militarism that made it possible had, once again, their parallels in the West, but in Russia the notion of great-power status acquired a very special significance. Both the monarchy and its Communist successor legitimized their authority by projecting an image of invincible power. What better way to inculcate among their own people the sense of futility of resistance than to show that the whole world feared Russia?

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There thus arose an intimate link between Russia's status as a great power and its internal stability. One of the principal reasons for the collapse of czarism in 1917, rarely mentioned by scholars captive to the class-war theory of history, is the steady decline of the monarchy's claim to great-power status as a result of military defeat in the Crimean war of 1854-56, the diplomatic setback following the Balkan war of 1877-78, the debacle in the conflict with Japan in 1904-05, and finally the repeated thrashing at the hands of the Germans in World War I. As a consequence of these humiliations, the monarchy, in the eyes of its subjects, lost the "mandate of heaven," and all the more so since it also proved itself unable to cope with radical terrorism on its home territory.

This historic legacy explains why, of all the empires that have dissolved since World War II, none has had such a difficult time adjusting to decolonization as Russia. Great Britain, whose empire once encircled the globe, made a quick accommodation to its loss, as did France, Portugal, and the other European powers to theirs. For them, colonial possessions, while a source of pride and possibly profit, were not factors making for self-identity. England, for one, had developed a strong sense of nationhood by the 16th century, before it acquired significant overseas territories.

In Russia, however, the sense of ethnic identity was always indissolubly linked with empire, and its loss has produced bewilderment and anguish. Indeed, nothing so much troubles many Russians today, not even the decline in their living standards or the prevalence of crime, and nothing so lowers in their eyes the prestige of their government, as the precipitous loss of great-power status. A superpower under Communism, a peer of the United States, their country is now, they feel, treated like a third-world nation, the humble recipient of Western largesse. A great deal of the appeal of the red-brown (Communist-Fascist) coalition derives precisely from its promise to restore to Russia the status of a respected—that is, feared—world power.

THUS FAR Russia's past. What about Russia's future?

The sense of isolation and uniqueness bequeathed by Orthodox Christianity unfortunately survives. Present-day Russians still feel themselves to be outsiders, a nation *sui generis*, belonging neither to Europe nor to Asia. There is a great deal of paranoia about foreigners, who, whatever their own private rivalries may be, are thought to be united in a hostile bloc determined somehow to "get" Russia. According to recent polls, for example, 60 percent of Russians believe that the Western powers are offering economic advice (and, presumably, aid) for the purpose of weakening the country.

To illustrate this widespread attitude, let me relate a personal incident. A few years ago I happened to be at a conference in Switzerland where one of the participants was a Russian official of cabinet rank. During lunch, flanked by two Russian ambassadors, he complained that foreign powers were conspiring to bar his country's access to international markets. As evidence, he adduced the fact that in the previous year Russia had purchased 600,000 cars from Japan, while Japan imported only 20,000 cars from Russia. The difference in quality between Russian and Japanese cars apparently eluded him, as did the fierce competition between Japanese and American automakers, and American complaints about the closed Japanese market. All he saw was "them" ganging up on "us."

Irrational as such suspicions are, the sense of being hemmed in by an unfriendly Western world is very real. Paranoia in Russia feeds on itself, seeking and finding confirmation in everything that happens—emphatically including the recent Western decision to expand NATO up to the very borders of the former Soviet Union. This move has aroused the deepest anxieties in Russians, corroborating their belief that, even after embracing democracy and the market economy, they are regarded as pariahs, unworthy of full membership in the community of nations. I know no Russian, regardless of political orientation, who favors it. To the contrary, NATO's projected expansion plays directly into the hands of the nationalists who exploit fears of the West to argue that Russia must reconstruct the empire and rebuild the military in order to hold its own in an unfriendly world.

If these are some of the factors that cloud the prospects in international relations, Russia faces no less extraordinary difficulties at home in making the transition from totalitarianism to democracy, and from a command economy to one based on the market. After all, democracy and a market economy, the distinctive features of modernity, rest on private property and, its corollary, the rule of law; as we have seen, neither has deep roots in Russia's culture.

The past five years have witnessed frenetic seizures of assets previously monopolized by the Communist party and, since its dissolution, up for grabs. But these seizures, which really amount to theft of public property, and which have largely

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benefited the old Communist apparatus itself, have so far not enhanced respect for private ownership. For one thing, the assets have been acquired by extra-legal means. For another, the new owners of real estate and industrial enterprises tend to dispose of them for dollars, which they export and deposit in foreign banks. "Privatization" of this kind brings little benefit to the Russian economy and only reinforces the prevalent view that capitalism equals speculation and profiteering.

There are, to be sure, positive aspects even to this process. The transfer of the nation's wealth from the state into private hands is proceeding apace: perhaps as much as three-quarters of the Gross Domestic Product of Russia today emanates from the private sector. This means that the state no longer controls the economy and cannot use it as a weapon of social control. Furthermore, every owner of property has a vested interest in the rule of law to the extent that it serves his advantage; for even if he has obtained his wealth unlawfully, he relies on the law to safeguard it for him. It may well be that Boris Yeltsin and the reformers with whom he surrounded himself until his recent lurch to the Right knowingly promoted privatization in order to raise insuperable obstacles to a restoration of Communism.

In the meantime, however, the new order borders on anarchy. Russian governments have traditionally denied their people the right to interfere in affairs of state. Politics has meant administration, and law has represented an administrative device rather than a principle superior alike to sovereign and subject and binding on both. As a result, whenever the Russian state has lacked the physical power to enforce its directives, it has become virtually impotent.

This is what has happened since 1991. The legislature has no influence on Kremlin decisions; its votes are at best indicators of the public mood. The Duma, the lower house of parliament, consists of singularly irresponsible politicians whose main occupation is to provide an outlet for personal and public frustrations. Not long ago, in total disregard of constitutional norms, a substantial majority of Duma deputies voted to annul the accord, signed in late 1991 by Russia's President, which dissolved the Soviet Union and granted independence to its constituent republics. This is roughly equivalent to the British House of Commons declaring Canada or India dependencies of England and subject to its laws.

Present-day Russia is not so much a single, integrated state as a congeries of 89 quasi-sovereign baronies, regions formally bound to Moscow but in reality concerned principally with their own parochial interests. The governors, most of them appointed by the President but occasionally elected by their constituents, act like satraps, obeying commands of the center only to the extent that it suits them. Governors who enjoy strong local popularity have been known to defy Moscow's orders to resign.

One sometimes gains the impression that about the only effective authority left to Moscow is financial, through the allocation of subsidies to the provinces—one of the few sources of control still available to the center—the borrowing of money abroad, and the printing of bank notes. The Kremlin also controls much television programming, a power it uses to promote the interests of the incumbent president. Otherwise, though, the Russian government can hardly be said to exist. Government decrees are largely ignored by a populace which, to the extent that it recognizes any higher power, looks to the provincial authorities. Witness the inability of President Yeltsin even to control his armed forces: his solemn pledge, personally given on television at the end of March, that Russian troops would forthwith cease combat operations in Chechnya seems to have fallen on deaf ears.

ALTOGETHER THE political situation in Russia closely resembles that prevailing in the period between the abdication of the czar in February 1917 and the Bolshevik coup the following October—with the important difference that Russia today is not at war, and that utopian fantasies no longer captivate either the intelligentsia or the masses. But again, as in the field of economics, the picture is not all bleak. The present government is the first in the entire history of Russia to enjoy a popular mandate: the incumbent President was chosen by a popular vote and the constitution was approved by a nationwide referendum. Such legitimacy has no precedent in a country where authority was traditionally acquired not by consent but by virtue either of inheritance or of a coup d'état. At long last, Russians have been offered the opportunity to build a viable democratic system.

Whether they are capable of taking advantage of this opportunity, time alone will show. Many Russians believe that no matter who wins the presidential election, Yeltsin will hold on to office. Public-opinion polls conducted in the first three months of this year reveal a curious contradiction: each month, more voters say they will cast ballots

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for the Communist leader Zyuganov, and yet at the same time, in similarly growing numbers, they express the conviction that Yeltsin will continue as Russia's head of state.

The doubts about Russia's future that remain are largely owing to the political inexperience of the Russian people. Under Communism, "elections" were pageants which required 99 percent of the voters to certify their delight with the status quo. Before Communism, the last time Russia had genuine multiparty elections was in November 1917, when 44 million men and women twenty years of age and older cast ballots for the Constituent Assembly. This means that in 1991, when the next free elections took place, only those citizens ninety-four years of age or older had had any experience with freely choosing candidates, parties, and platforms.

An inexperienced electorate tends to swing wildly. Contemporary Russians expect their head of state to be a magician; they are prepared to entrust him with unlimited power, so long as he uses it to solve all their problems, quickly and painlessly. Since there are no miracles in life, disenchantment invariably sets in. This happened in the late 1980's under Mikhail Gorbachev, whose popularity plummeted when perestroika did not fulfill its promises; it has happened again under Yeltsin; and it would indubitably happen under Zyuganov should he be elected.

Sooner or later—I fear it will be later rather than sooner—Russians will come to realize that there are no rapid fixes to their difficulties, and that ahead of them lies the arduous task of building a modern state and a modern economy from the bottom up. Until then, we will confront an electorate so unseasoned, so naive, that, if we are to believe the polls, one out of ten voters wants to award the presidency to a buffoon and brawler by the name of Vladimir Zhirinovsky, the author of a political treatise entitled *Spit on the West*.

GIVEN ALL this, finally, how great is the danger of a restoration of Communism and of a Communist empire? If the Communists were to win the presidential election, could they turn back the clock?

The formal program of the Communist party sounds innocuous enough, being modeled on Western social-democratic platforms. It specifically disavows any desire to implement the fundamental principle of Communism—namely, the abolition of private property. But there are indications that this formal program only camouflages the Communists' true intent. In Russian political jargon it represents the "program minimum," the immediately realizable agenda behind which lurks the ultimate objective, the "program maximum."

A law on economic reform, recently drafted by the Communist faction in the Duma, sheds light on what that maximal program is in the economic sphere. The law would give the state a greatly enhanced role in managing the economy and impose strict regulations on private enterprise. Land ownership would be outlawed, prices regulated, and foreign investments rigorously controlled. The whole economy would once again be subjected to a plan. As for the political intentions of the Communist party, these have not yet been spelled out, but it is safe to assume that here, too, it takes the past as a model.

Unquestionably, a Communist victory would cause severe dislocations in Russia's economy: rampant inflation, massive hoarding, a decrease and possibly suspension of foreign investments. But a reversion to Communism seems to me highly unlikely. Communism was not merely an ideology. It was a complex phenomenon composed of various interlocking institutions, including one-party rule, police terror, state monopoly of productive wealth, total control of publications and education, repression of religious faiths, and so on; it atomized society, depriving people of the right to form independent associations of even the most harmless kind.

It took the Communists two decades, from 1917 to 1937, to impose this regime on Russia: twenty years of revolution, civil war, collectivization, and massacres euphemistically labeled "purges." It is inconceivable that any Russian government would have the capacity once again to subjugate society in this manner. And even if the older generation, conditioned to submission, could be brought back into the totalitarian fold, younger Russians under thirty-five, who according to all evidence are extremely skeptical of every ideology, will not be readily reharnessed in state service. One can only imagine the resistance that would greet such an attempt from the class of new proprietors, among them a high proportion of ex-Communist functionaries, who surely would not surrender their recent gains, whether legitimate or ill-gotten, without a fight.

Nor is a milder form of Communism feasible. A Communist regime must be of one piece: it cannot tolerate even limited private property or free opinion. In the late 1980's we witnessed the swift collapse of Soviet Communism as a result of Gor-

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bachev's futile effort to revitalize a moribund economy by injecting a measure of freedom into the system. There is no reason to believe that another attempt to combine Communism with elements of capitalism will be more successful.

THE CHANCES are, therefore, that no matter who wins the forthcoming elections, Russia will have to muddle along for a long time under a regime of pseudo-democracy and quasi-capitalism. The worst of the realistic scenarios appears to be an authoritarian government that will liquidate political rivalries and rule by decree while tolerating considerable economic and even intellectual freedom. The model may be General Pinochet's Chile, which today has quite a few Russian admirers. Such a regime would very likely form a transition to democracy rather than to neo-totalitarianism.

The empire, too, is unlikely to be reconstituted, despite widespread nostalgia for it. The experience of Western imperial powers indicates that once colonies have been granted independence, there is no return to the past. Each emancipated colony evolves its own elites with a keen interest in perpetuating the powers and privileges gained from independence; clerks who have become ministers, sergeants who have become generals, are not likely to accept timidly a demotion to their former rank. The economy changes, too, with the pattern of exports and imports shifting focus from the one-time metropolis to other countries. These considerations suggest that only naked force could restore the separated republics to Moscow's hegemony. This force Russia lacks, as has been evidenced by its inability to subdue minuscule Chechnya.

True, by a combination of economic carrots and sticks, as well as by exploiting discontents among Russian minorities living in the "near abroad," Moscow might bring the separated republics into a closer union. But it is difficult to see how the empire itself can be restored. It would require an effort of no less monumental dimensions than the restoration of Communism.

In sum, there are reasons for cautious optimism. The burden of history does weigh heavily; but it only slows Russia's progress, it does not condemn the country to immobility, let alone regression. My own hopes rest on the assumption that Russia, a country aspiring to the status of a respected world power, will not want to opt out of the 21st century.

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Race, Lies, and "Hopwood"

Carl Cohen

OVER THE past three decades, the once-honorable aim of affirmative action—combating racial discrimination—has been replaced by its inverse. For most Americans, affirmative action now means not the combating of discrimination but rather its enforcement through a system of preferences. Whatever one's judgment of the motives of those who engineered this historic reversal of aims, there is no doubt about the fact of it. Affirmative-action "plans" and "programs" are devices designed to give advantages and to impose handicaps according to racial, ethnic, and sexual categories.

Nowhere has affirmative action in this perverted sense had greater influence than in college and university admissions. Now, however, in an explosive decision of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit, *Cheryl Hopwood* v. *State of Texas*,[1] such preferences have at last been proscribed. If the Supreme Court upholds this decision on appeal, its impact upon the laws governing race-based programs in higher education will be very great, and this is a result long overdue.

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SINCE 1978, the ruling Supreme Court precedent in this sphere has been *Regents of the University of California* v. *Bakke*.[2] In that case, Allan Bakke, a white man, was held to have been unlawfully disadvantaged in his application to the medical school of the University of California at Davis because of a racially discriminatory admissions system—a quota system—which favored nonwhites less qualified than he.

In *Bakke*, four members of the Court, led by Justice John Paul Stevens, found the admissions program at Davis an indubitable violation of Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.[3] No constitutional issues need even be addressed, said they: the admissions system of the university violated the relevant statute and that was enough. Four other members of the Court, led by Justice William F. Brennan, argued that in view of the historical purpose of the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment ("No State shall . . . deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws"),

[1] March 18, 1996, No. 94-50569.

[2] 438 U.S. 265. A very similar 1974 case involving the University of Washington law school, *DeFunis* v. *Odegaard*, was held moot in the end, and made no law.

[3] "No person in the United States shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." Virtually all American universities receive some federal financial assistance and are therefore governed by this title.

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which the university was claiming to advance through its quota system, constitutional issues were indeed unavoidable—and went on to find the Davis program acceptable.

The division between the two sets of Justices was as sharp as it was even, and between them no compromise was possible. Nor did Justice Lewis Powell, who cast the deciding vote, seek a compromise. In fact, he agreed completely with the Stevens group that the California system was unlawful and impermissible. But he also agreed with the Brennan group that to resolve the case, constitutional questions did need to be confronted—although he came out on the other side, concluding that the medical school's admissions system violated not only the 1964 Civil Rights Act but the Constitution as well. And so Allan Bakke was ordered admitted, and Powell's opinion became the judgment of the Court.

So far, so good. But Powell, fatefully, went a step further. He felt the need to adjust one portion of the earlier decision in this same case by the supreme court of California, which had ordered the university to eliminate *all* consideration of race in its admissions process. Believing that in this respect the California court had precluded too much, Justice Powell sought to draw a line close to theirs, but with more nuance. He observed that universities do well when they welcome a variety of viewpoints, and encourage robust intellectual exchange. And he posited that ethnic variety could in some cases advance that intellectual objective, and therefore that attention to race ought not to be completely proscribed.

Let us be clear. Never for a moment did Powell suggest that ethnic proportionality might be a legitimate goal in itself. On this point he could hardly have been more forceful: if the purpose of a university's special-admissions program were "to assure within its student body *some specified percentage* [emphasis added] of a particular group merely because of its race or ethnic origin," such a preferential purpose would be constitutionally invalid on its face. Only in pursuit of its proper intellectual business should a university be permitted to consider the race of applicants, along with other "diversity" factors, in making admissions decisions.

Thus it was that the concept of "diversity" first came to juridical prominence. In his worst dreams, Powell was not likely to have imagined the ways in which that concept would be exploited over the ensuing years. Because he was the only member of the majority giving an interpretation of the equal protection clause, and because his was the deciding vote, his opinion was widely taken to delineate the permissible *constitutional* use of race in university admissions. Although the particular affirmative-action program at the Davis medical school was condemned, affirmative action itself marched on victoriously, under the twin banners of *Bakke* and diversity. Today, diversity remains the shield of legitimacy for outright favoritism, the talisman with which institutionalized preference by race has been justified without (until *Hopwood*) apparent fear of constitutional attack.

JUSTICE POWELL was a man of moderation, and he was honest. But in allowing a consideration of race as, in some circumstances, a proxy for intellectual diversity, he made a very great blunder. It is wrong and unfair to suppose that being black or being white, or being any other color (or sex, or ethnic group), entails the possession of any given attitudes or judgments. In a society in which so many have suffered so painfully from stereotypes, the last thing needed was official stereotyping by the Supreme Court.

And Powell's blunder had practical consequences that could not be prevented. He himself saw that universities, under the guise of seeking intellectual diversity, might continue to employ outright racial preference in admissions deviously. Yet he believed that if the rules were clear, honorable educators would not cheat. "A court would not assume," Powell wrote, "that a university, professing to employ a nondiscriminatory admissions policy, would operate it as a cover for the functional equivalent of a quota system. In short, good faith would be presumed."

But good faith was not the chief concern of those to whom this warning was addressed. Having been advised that they might weigh race along with other factors to achieve diversity, universities found irresistible the pressure to use race in ways going very far beyond the limits that Powell had drawn.

Thus, although the Constitution forbids the use of race to achieve targeted percentages, such uses are nearly universal now. Although the Supreme Court, in *Bakke*, explicitly disallowed wholesale compensation for "societal discrimination," such compensatory awards are now commonplace. University admissions systems are, in fact, thoroughly pervaded by

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racial preference. The preferences given are not merely at the margins; they are not occasional or secondary; they are not simply "plus factors" introduced when the records of applicants are otherwise nearly indistinguishable. Rather, the preferences given are very substantial; they involve the identification and primary sorting of all applicants by ethnic group; and they are carefully designed to achieve predetermined numerical objectives.

In clear if tacit acknowledgment that such programs are, in fact, legally and morally suspect, they are for the most part kept hidden. In most universities, discretionary authority, granted by the administration to admissions officers, obscures much of what goes on. Documents in which preferences are discussed or revealed are typically marked "CONFIDENTIAL, Internal Use Only"—and can usually be obtained, if at all, only with great difficulty.[4]

Published descriptions of these admissions practices invariably invoke language that carefully mirrors the phrasing of Powell's passages on diversity. At the University of Michigan, for example, administrators insist that "we consider race along with a range of other factors." This is technically true, but it is also a deception. While other factors are considered for some applicants, only race serves as *the* threshold consideration in terms of which *all* applicants are first reviewed, and by which offers of admission are portioned out.

Admissions officers also routinely stress that the attainments and characteristics of applicants as *individuals* are carefully weighed: leadership qualities, social concern as exhibited by community activities, the capacity to overcome adversity, and other nonquantifiable virtues and achievements. They are right to consider such merits; neither undergraduate nor professional-school admissions ought to be determined exclusively by test scores or grade-point averages (GPA's). Although intellectual qualities should be of the first importance, applicants do sometimes display nonintellectual credits that are so unusual as to justify what would otherwise be anomalous action. Everyone understands this.

But such nonquantifiable considerations cannot account for a *pattern* of racially distorted outcomes. After all, applicants with special talents, needs, or achievements will exist in every group. Altruism, evidence of handicaps overcome, dedication to one's community, and the like are not found disproportionately among members of any one race or nationality. While such non-numerical factors may fairly count in individual cases, they cannot explain systematic bias by race.

YET THERE is systematic bias by race, and this can be demonstrated beyond doubt. Anyone looking for proof is well advised to examine the data assembled in the Autumn 1995 issue of the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*. The editors of that journal had requested admissions figures from 25 highly esteemed universities and another 25 highly esteemed liberal-arts colleges. Each was asked: what percentage of all students applying to your institution is accepted? And then, what percentage of black applicants is accepted?

Among the universities, 10 of the 25—including Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Stanford, Duke, and Columbia—refused to supply the data requested. Of the 15 that did respond, 12 revealed that acceptance rates for blacks are (in the words of the *Journal*) "significantly higher than acceptance rates for whites." At the University of Virginia, for example, 54.2 percent of black applicants were accepted in 1995, as opposed to an overall acceptance rate of 36.6 percent. At Rice, the acceptance rate for blacks in the same year was 51.7 percent, while that for whites was less than half that figure. This pattern is nearly universal.

Among the liberal-arts colleges approached by the *Journal*, the figures show even greater partiality. Amherst, for example, reported an overall acceptance rate of 19.2 percent in 1995, but its acceptance rate for black applicants was 51.1 percent. For Bowdoin, the figures were 30.4 percent and 70.2 percent. And so on. The director of admissions at Williams, declining to respond, said gingerly: "We think these figures should remain in-house because of the current anger over affirmative action"; one can easily imagine what the figures are.

What the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* showed for the institutions it surveyed is replicated very widely. Take, for example, two large

[4] Even those who govern the university may sometimes be kept in the dark. At the University of California, where exposure of such practices recently led the Regents to eliminate the most egregious examples of preference, one member of the Board, Ward Connerly, wrote to another: "I came to the conclusion that we are breaking the law. There is no other way to put it. *We are breaking the law!*"

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state institutions, the Universities of Michigan (UM) and California (UC), both outstanding centers of liberal-arts and professional studies.

Universities commonly prepare, for internal use, a table or grid reporting both applications and offers of admission by category. At UM this grid is divided for undergraduate applications into 108 categories, or cells, delineated by "former-school GPA" on the vertical axis, and "best test score" (SAT or ACT) on the horizontal axis. In each cell appear the number of applicants in that category, and the number offered admission. Separate grids in identical form are prepared for all students and for "underrepresented minorities."

In the UM profile of 1994 (the latest available), the minority-admission rate was higher than the nonminority-admission rate in almost every cell in which there were any minority applicants at all, and in many cells the rate was *very* much higher. Thus, for applicants with GPA's between 2.80 and 2.99 (B-), and SAT scores between 1200 and 1290 (out of 1600), the nonminority-admission rate was 12 percent and the minority rate 100 percent. For applicants whose GPA was between 3.40 and 3.60 (B+), and whose SAT scores were 900-990, the nonminority rate was 13 percent and the minority rate was 98 percent. For applicants with GPA's between 3.60 and 3.79 (A-), and SAT scores 800-890, the nonminority rate was 12 percent and the minority rate was 100 percent. And so on. Similar patterns are disclosed by the reports of the University of Michigan's law and medical schools.

At the University of California, the admission grids of the law schools and medical schools, pried loose only by repeated Freedom-of-Information-Act requests, disclose preferences so gross that the Regents understandably concluded they could not hope to defend the system in court. Thus, the UC Berkeley School of Law offered admission to *every* black applicant with both a GPA of 3.5 or above and a Law School Aptitude Test (LSAT) percentile score of 90 or above; of all the white applicants with the same records, only 42 percent were offered admission. Again, in the GPA range 3.25-3.49, with LSAT percentile scores of 70-74.9, all black applicants were admitted, while not one of the 34 white applicants or 12 Asian applicants was offered a place. The story is essentially the same at Davis, at UCLA (where in one cell the acceptance rate for blacks was 61 times higher than the acceptance rate for whites), and throughout the UC system, both in law schools and in medical schools.

Here is the plain truth of the matter: if you are a B or a C student, and if you are white or Asian, you would be wasting your time and your money (there are substantial application fees) applying to the University of California law or medical schools. But if you have the same record and are black or Hispanic, your chances for admission to one of these schools are vastly better. And whatever your academic record may be, if you are black or Hispanic, you have a very significant advantage in the competition for prized admission slots.

One would expect the acceptance rate for a given group to be higher if its academic performance were stronger; but, as everyone knows, performance does not explain current admissions disparities. In fact, the performance of minority groups accepted at greatly higher rates is significantly weaker, not stronger, than that of others—and in many cases it is weaker than that of others who have been *rejected*.

All this, now proved beyond cavil, has been repeatedly and publicly denied by the University of California, as it is denied by the University of Michigan. Both universities proudly proclaim that they do not discriminate on the basis of "race, color, or national origin." Both universities are lying. And they are hardly alone.

AND SO to the University of Texas. Like all good law schools, Texas had established presumptive score levels for admission and for denial of admission. But these presumptive levels varied dramatically by race.

The appellate court that heard the *Hopwood* case was nearly incredulous. Here is its report of the way the system worked:

> [B]y March of 1992, because the presumptive *denial* score for whites was a TI [Texas Index, a composite of undergraduate GPA and LSAT scores] of 192 or lower, and the presumptive admit for minorities was 189 or higher, a minority candidate with a TI of 189 or above almost certainly would be admitted, even though his score was considerably below the level at which a white candidate almost certainly would be rejected. Out of the pool of resident applicants who fell within this range . . . , 100 percent of blacks and 90 percent of Mexican Americans,

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but only 6 percent of whites, were offered admission.[5]

Scrutinizing these racial preferences, the Fifth Circuit Court concluded that the admissions system at Texas plainly violated the equal-protection clause. All the defenses put forward by the state of Texas—and most emphatically the goal of achieving a diverse student body—were rejected unconditionally.

Universities around the country have found the *Hopwood* decision shocking. They have reviled the court, labeling its decision "ignorant," "unequivocally mistaken," and "cavalier." But the reasoning of that decision was rigorous and sound. The court proceeded first by determining the standard by which the university must be judged, and then by applying that standard to the law school's admission practices.

The first of these steps was easy: race-based programs are always suspect, always invidious. Therefore, by long-settled law, the standard by which such programs must be judged is that of "strict scrutiny": to be justifiable, any racially preferential device must be shown to serve a *compelling government interest*, and then must be shown to have been *narrowly tailored* to satisfy that interest.[6]

Are there *any* interests so compelling as to justify governmental uses of racial classifications? Yes, there are. Persons found to have been unlawfully discriminated against because of race are surely entitled to remedy. And race, once having been proved to be an element in the wrong done, *may* also be an unavoidable element in ameliorating the harm. The burden upon those who would so use race is very heavy, as it ought to be—but it is a burden that may, in some special circumstances, be sustained.

Needless to say, the Texas law school sought to persuade the court that the admissions preferences it gave fell into this class. Texas's arguments boiled down to three, all rejected by the court.

First, the injuries for which the preferences were, allegedly, a remedy had been inflicted in part by the public schools of the state of Texas, which (the law school lamented) have historically discriminated against blacks from the elementary grades through secondary schools.

Yet, as the court pointed out, if the law school were permitted to "remedy" the present effects of past discrimination in Texas public schools, nothing could preclude racial preferences by any state agency in hiring, or in government contracts, or in any other state activity affected by the educational attainments of applicants. Moreover, the Supreme Court itself has explicitly rejected the use of past "societal discrimination" to justify race-based remedial programs, on the ground that it is too amorphous a category. For there is no way of determining the present effects of earlier discrimination in primary and secondary schools, or their magnitude, and therefore no way of determining what might be an appropriate antidote for those alleged effects.

In any case, the preferences in the law school's admissions were very plainly not designed to offer any such remedy. They were conferred equally on applicants who attended public and private schools, and equally upon minorities whose schooling had been in Texas and out of Texas. It was simply not true that earlier wrongful conduct by the state of Texas had been the impetus behind the preferences.

THIS BRINGS us to the school's second defense. In the words of the decision, the standard of strict scrutiny would be satisfied, a compelling need for this "remedy" shown, only if the state could identify the law school itself, and not some other agency or institution, "as the relevant alleged past discriminator," and then only if it could prove that the "present effects of [its] past discrimination [were] of the type that justify the racial classifications at issue." And so the school maintained that the preferences were indeed a remedy for its own earlier misconduct (as well as that of the Texas schools); after all, the law school had discriminated against blacks in the past, and even though such practices were eliminated decades ago, that earlier discrimination still had present effects.

To which the court responded that there was no way for Texas to measure, or even rationally to estimate, the present effects of racial discrimination imposed by the law school in earlier generations, and therefore no way to know whether or if current admissions preferences addressed those effects.

A third try amounted to public chest-beating. We have been so bad, said the law school, that our badness is everywhere known and despised. We have, it asserted, a "lingering reputation in the minority community, particularly with

[5] *Hopwood* pp. 8-9.

[6] *Adarand Constructors* v. *Peña*, a 1995 Supreme Court decision, reaffirmed this standard, and made it clear that it applies to programs at all levels, including the federal government.

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prospective students, as a 'white' school . . . and [there is] some perception that the law school is a hostile environment for minorities."

But these effects, too, even if substantiated, could not possibly justify the remedial use of race in the admissions process. As a different federal circuit court put it in a 1994 case involving the University of Maryland,

> mere knowledge of historical fact is not the kind of present effect that can justify any race-exclusive remedy. If it were otherwise, as long as there are people who have access to history books, there will be programs such as this.

Nor, more fundamentally, could the allegedly hostile reputation be substantiated at Texas. There, programs designed to attract minorities were first implemented in the 1960's; minority recruiting has long been vigorous, and substantial amounts of money are spent to advance it. Most faculty, staff, and students have had absolutely nothing to do with any discrimination that the school practiced decades ago, and if there are hostile relations among the races on the campus today, they simply cannot be tied to past discrimination by the school.

The upshot: "[T]he law school has failed to show a compelling state interest in remedying the present effect of past discrimination sufficient to maintain the use of race in its admissions system."[7]

FOR THE law school, that left the claim of intellectual diversity as its only hope. But that, too, turned out to be no hope at all. Powell himself had made it crystal clear in 1978 that the goal of intellectual diversity cannot possibly justify systematic preferences aimed at ethnic balance. But the *Hopwood* court went further. Attending to recent and carefully formulated judgments of the Supreme Court, it found the entire diversity caper to be misguided.

For one thing, the court noted, the word "diversity" appears nowhere in the *Bakke* case except in Justice Powell's discourse on the topic. Not one other Justice, then or since, has concurred with his views of diversity as a constitutional interest that might support some use of racial classification. Even the Justices who *supported* the university's admissions program in *Bakke* suggested in their dissent that the quest for "an integrated student body" could not by itself serve as justification for preference. Powell's opinion alone therefore cannot bind lower courts, and may not be supposed to lay down the constitutional rules governing the way race can be used.

For another thing, the Supreme Court has clearly and repeatedly explained what can and what cannot serve as a justification for race-based government action under the Constitution. Its decisions, which *are* binding, explicitly exclude the quest for diversity. As four Justices of the present Court (Sandra Day O'Connor, William H. Rehnquist, Antonin Scalia, and Anthony Kennedy) put it in a 1990 case involving broadcast media:

> Modern equal protection has recognized only one [compelling state] interest: remedying the effects of racial discrimination. The interest in increasing the diversity of broadcast viewpoints is clearly not a compelling interest. It is simply too amorphous, too insubstantial, and too unrelated to any legitimate basis for employing racial classifications.[8]

Finally, the Texas court observed, the use of diversity to justify race-based programs does not promote, it actually *undermines*, the goals of the Fourteenth Amendment. It enhances racial stereotypes, fuels racial hostilities, fosters racial divisions. To strive for an entering class displaying different skin colors, said the court, "is no more rational on its own terms than would be choices based upon the physical size or blood type of applicants." In fact, using race in this manner "exemplifies, encourages, and legitimizes the mode of thought and behavior that underlies most prejudice and bigotry in modern America."

SUCH TRUTHS have been a long time coming from the American judiciary, and are all the more welcome for that. Does this mean, then, that the days of racial preference in university admissions may be coming to an end? Yes, if the

[7] Since no remedial interest was shown, and no other interest was accepted as compelling, the court held it unnecessary even to address the question of whether the program was indeed narrowly tailored, as the strict-scrutiny standard requires. But the federal district court, hearing the case at an earlier date, had addressed that matter as well and held that, even supposing the remedial interests genuine, the law school's admission program was certainly not narrowly tailored to address them. So the school flunked both tests.

[8] *Metro Broadcasting* v. *FCC*. This passage was written as part of a dissenting opinion, but the same reasoning lay at the core of the majority opinion that overturned *Metro Broadcasting* in 1995.

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Supreme Court accepts *Hopwood* on appeal and affirms it. (That the Supreme Court will indeed hear this case seems to be the presumption of the circuit court, which in late April granted a stay of its ruling to give Texas officials time to file their appeal.) Alternatively, the Court may find it more prudent to rely upon the accumulation of circuit-court opinions, buttressed by legislation, to resolve the matter without direct intervention.

Such legislation is, in any case, pending in many jurisdictions. In Congress, the Equal Opportunity Act of 1995, if adopted, would bar the federal government from giving any preferences by race, or obliging or encouraging others to do so. Similar statutes are in the works in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and now Arizona. In South Carolina and Michigan, efforts are also under way to enact constitutional amendments for-bidding preferences. And, of course, in California the Civil Rights Initiative will be on the ballot this fall and has a good chance of success.[9]

Some universities are beginning to clean house on their own initiative, or as a result of prodding by public officials. At the University of California, affirmative action has already been drastically remolded; in Colorado, the state-university system has changed the rules so as to ensure that race can be, at most, one of several criteria considered; and in Georgia, where the attorney general has formally recommended that all race-based admissions and financial-aid policies be abandoned, state colleges and universities are likely to follow suit.

But the sailing will not be smooth everywhere. In *Bakke*, Justice Powell expressed his confidence in the good faith of university officers, a confidence their conduct has shown to have been misplaced. The *Hopwood* court was less trusting. Mindful of likely efforts to evade the force of its stricture, it gave fair warning:

> [I]f the [Texas] law school continues to operate a disguised or overt racial classification system in the future, its actors could be subject to actual and punitive damages.

Whatever happens at the University of Texas, in other places the push to go on doing covertly what the law forbids may continue until evasion is made too costly. As the president of the University of Michigan put it defiantly, "If certain avenues are shut off, we'll try to find other ways to get the same result."

STILL, THERE can be no doubt that the *Hopwood* decision represents, to quote a headline in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "A Stunning Blow to Affirmative Action"—at least as affirmative action has come to be defined. So let us suppose that we will indeed live to see the elimination of racial preferences in university admissions. What then? In particular, what would be the impact of such a development on the numbers of minority students on campus?

The answer, painful though it may be, is clear. To the extent that minority enrollments have depended upon the special preferences given to favored groups, those numbers would fall, at least temporarily. (As Thomas Sowell has pointed out, however, there might well be ancillary gains, as students turned down by elite institutions turn to the second- and third-rank schools which they are better qualified to attend and which would benefit from their presence.) But in any case, racial justice does not entail racial proportionality, and never did. Public policy cannot be judged, and it certainly cannot be advanced, by measuring the degree to which its results approximate some predetermined numerical outcome; if we can bear that in mind, we may yet arrive at the blessed day when we will no longer count by race in any public sphere.

The elimination of preferences in universities would have another worthy consequence as well. Once the residual impact of preferences has dissipated, we may live to see an abatement in the nasty stereotypes of inferiority which those preferences inevitably engendered and just as inevitably reinforced. The cruel supposition that all blacks and other minorities occupy their places by dint of charity may ultimately pass away. Racial canards, unspoken but widely believed, may lose their claims to credibility.

Relations between the races on our campuses today are as bad as they have ever been. Only when racial preferences come to an end, with all the mischief they have done, will we begin to see a healing of the wounds we have so heedlessly inflicted on ourselves.

[9] The one-sentence operative paragraph of the California initiative reads in full: "The state shall not discriminate against, or grant preferential treatment to, any individual or group on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in the operation of public employment, public education, or public contracting." This wording differs from that of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 only in the addition of the phrase: "or grant preferential treatment to." At issue in the California Civil Rights Initiative, therefore, is not "affirmative action" in its original intent—of which no mention appears—but only preferential treatment.

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Expectations

George Konrád

Hanukkah 1995

WE ARE waiting for the child to arrive and take its place among us.

There is much preparation for the arrival. Guests are assembling in a way that reminds me of the ancient wise men of the East, though they are hardly all from the East, there are many more than three of them, and they are not coming on camels. We greet each of them, and they, in turn, clink their glasses, have a bite, and draw their breaths in peace. Then they raise their glasses to the child, the bringer of light whom we await.

Next to its small cradle we sit, dispensing with words, while the one day's supply of oil burns for eight. The child is still to come, still barely the image of us who are already formed, still capable of becoming anything at all. It could come any day now: in the form, as it happens, of a little girl, whose name might be Zsuzsa, Vilma, Franciska, Magda, or something else. The little coat, hat, and soft blanket stand in expectation, as do the siblings and the grandmothers, friends, and neighbors—and I, the father, a grandfather in age. More than anyone else, the one who carries her is waiting, because this little one is long and heavy, and has not turned her noggin downward, so her mother feels it pressing against her heart.

Now is the beginning of winter, when we step onto the crackle of dry, brown leaves as we walk out of the house-gate, when the shivering mama cat on the porch curls up with her five black and white kittens, when the streets grow dark in the afternoon, when grim prophecies sound at home and abroad. At this season the self-conscious person tortures himself (if not others), thinking he has neglected something that can no longer be set right, because what happened, after all, *cannot* be set right; it is frozen into time's vault, filed away in the storehouse of the cosmos. Today, or tomorrow, you can do good—but not yesterday.

At times like this it is common, too, to await the arrival of the one who might know what we still do not, the one who will set us on a new road, mark a new beginning for the grand experiment. At times like this we await the next breath, the next bite of food, the next touch, the sun's next zenith and nadir, the next moment of self-abandon, the message, the walking papers, the verdict, the gate's opening, the darkness behind and the light ahead, the dousing of lamps, the moment of repose. Our hope is that someone

GEORGE KONRÁD, *the distinguished Hungarian novelist, was born in 1933. His widely acclaimed first novel,* The Case Worker, *was published in English in 1974 and was followed by* The City Builder (1977), Antipolitics (1984), A Feast in the Garden (1992), *and* The Melancholy of Rebirth (1995). *The present piece was translated from the Hungarian by* JAMES ANDREW TUCKER.

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else will do it—that the next generation will do it for our own.

Perhaps they will be more humane than we, more clear-sighted, more courageous, kinder—in a word, more perfect (though we would also not deprive them of the gift of frailty). They are, after all, born of us, but handsomer, more winning, with an advantage provided by their new-formed bodies and their simplicity. *This* person, still zero years of age, will surely set us right, no matter how much she may fling about in protest; she will acquit us of enormous charges, even as she sews unforeseen stitches into the great family carpet.

We wait, then, and make preparations, focusing our attention on the hour of arrival, though we still have the strength to rejoice on these dark, lengthening mornings at those who are already here, those who still live among us as well as those carried far off by the winds. I have the strength to be glad that I have lived to see this day, this eternal today, on which, at my advanced age, the past assumes greater importance than the future, and planning is obscured by reminiscence.

Even should such imaginings of the future be pure illusion—because my race may now be truly run, because this coffee and this toast may be my last breakfast—I nevertheless retain the right to gaze over the barrier-gate, out over the romantic juncture of the century's and the millennium's end. It takes self-control to peer optimistically into the third millennium. All that we have lived through will be, for this new arrival, the history of the former century. All that happens to her will be, for me, the next century's novel, now coming into being thanks to my children.

I see before me the faces of our dead, the expression with which *they* would look upon the newborn, if only they could stand here around her bed. My father would be ninety-eight. He would not say now what he said on the night of his death: "Now, my son, you see that a man's life amounts to nothing." I understand the differences between us, and know how I perpetuate him, both in the way my mind works and in the way I clasp my hands behind my back when I walk—just like one of my sons.

For now, the mother still carries the child within her, but later, the little one will carry us, knowingly or not, and will pass us along to as yet nonexistent strangers, who will bear a ridiculous resemblance to us.

I owe to this living creature about twenty years of my attention and cultivation, and she—let me be honest—could receive no greater gift. We will have a little more to do: one more place setting at the table, one more free will with its irritating and enchanting aspects. The eyes of my mother, eighty-nine, are sparkling now. She was a bit weaker over the summer, but is now, to all appearances, growing stronger. People need to have someone to give to, and the stork is happy to oblige them by depositing a package somewhere in the vicinity. Now, bundled with our expectation of the little one in swaddling clothes, we anticipate many other events—the breast's unbuttoning, the cleaning and wiping up and caressing—and by this time next year we will be holding her hand, which will try to free itself from our grip, and then, seeking safety, creep back.

If all goes well she will be returning our smiles by spring, and by summer will be scampering after her brothers on all fours; by fall, she will be shaking the bars of her walker or crib—Out! Out!—and a year from now, during the holiday of light and expectation, she will be making her own way, performing ever more complex operations, with goals of her own: Over there! In! Up! Down!, wanting to go in every direction, to spin, drop, swim, fly, grab, kick, spread out. This little lady will have needs: she will want nothing less than the entire world. It will not be hers, probably, but why throw in the towel at the outset?

"SO MANY messiahs!" I say to myself as I peer through the fence of the kindergarten, so many exceptional, anointed persons, designed by fate to be undying candle flames for those around them. We will listen to the affairs of her life—there will be many things to tell of—and laugh, if she wants to make us laugh, and wonder at the clever maze she spins, and at her sense of humor in telling a story. And she will sit on our knees and laugh at the same silly things her siblings did, and probably we ourselves did, once.

We are awaiting a playful person, who will take joy in things that others find tortuous. For she will know the way to the bottomless well, the unwinking light, the undying fire. We await a little woman whose soul will dominate over fatigue, which means that even if she has nothing, she will be rich.

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Among the Ashkenazim

Ralph de Toledano

WHEN I was a boy, my Aunt Zarita, a woman of wide experience and wider culture, said to me, "You will find as you grow older that you will get along much better with *los cristianos* than you will with the Ashkenazim. Because of your name, they will think you are one of them, and when you inform them that you are a Jew, there will be a brief flicker of anti-Semitism because even the best of them have that sixth toe. Then they will forget. But from the Ashkenazim you will usually get the *patada* [kick]. And most will resent you for being a *sefardita*."

My aunt, no bigot, turned out to be quite right about Ashkenazim, as Jews from East and Central Europe are called; in my own youthful experience they seemed both to resent and to envy Jews whose names, like mine, suggested an ancestry deriving from anywhere along the Mediterranean littoral, and in particular from old Spain (*Sefarad*). As a freshman at Columbia in the early 1930's I was ignored by Zeta Beta Tau, the Jewish fraternity, but was rushed by the Anglican Alpha Delts who considered me a "white Jew." (As my aunt had predicted, they meant no offense, thinking the characterization would please.) My first wife, of Russian Jewish origin, was never comfortable with my family—to her mother I was "that *s'fard*." But my second wife, who is Anglican, was puzzled to hear the remark of an Ashkenazi friend when we first got married: "Oh, your husband is a Spanish Jew? He probably wouldn't even talk to me."

MY HERITAGE goes back many centuries to a golden era in Spain when the Catholic monarchy bestowed on my family the particle of nobility, the "de" which some among my relatives would preserve and others reject. All this was before the mass expulsion of Jews in 1492, when my ancestor Daniel de Toledo, later Toledano—*jefe de los sabios* (chief of the wise men) and *gran rabino* of the great Jewish community in Castile—was forced to lead his clan to a new life in Tangier, in Morocco.

There they found an already existing community, "Moorish" Jews whose forebears had migrated from King Solomon's Israel on the ships of Hiram of Tyre. Once in Morocco, Daniel made a pact with the Sultan, clearly separating his flock from these native Jews (to whom the newcomers referred as *forasteros*, strangers).

If the stories I heard as a child were true, the *jefe de los sabios* lived not only to write the laws of his co-religionists, but to become Grand Vizier to the Sultan. For this and for other services, he and his descendants were awarded, in perpetuity,

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the heads of all cattle slaughtered in accordance with Jewish ritual law in Tangier, giving rise to the legend that the Toledanos got their intelligence from all the bovine brains they ate.

MY MORE recent past—I skip over generation upon generation of rabbinic leaders and authorities—was hardly less colorful. Zarita Nahon, my aunt, was the daughter of a man who, in the mid-19th century, ran guns in Morocco against the French and Spanish for Sir John Hay Drummond-Hay of the British Diplomatic and Consular Service, considered by some to be a progenitor of the modern British secret services. Once, on a bet, this man, my grandfather—he had been born José but was renamed Rafael during a serious illness in order to deceive the angel of death—swam the Strait of Gibraltar, a crueler passage than the English Channel. In his later years, José lost his sight. In their New York apartment, my grandmother Estrella would read to him night after night from *Don Quixote* and, when the last page had been turned, would start again from the beginning. He died with a tune from a *zarzuela* on his lips.

My aunt herself was a philologist and teacher of modern languages who brought the glories of French to generations of boys at DeWitt Clinton High School, then one of New York's best. Her students included, it seems, half the budding intellectuals in New York, among them the young literary-critic-to-be Lionel Trilling and the young poet-to-be Delmore Schwartz. ("You're Zarita Nahon's nephew?" Trilling asked me when I was an undergraduate and he a young professor at Columbia, and came very close to hugging me.) She traveled widely in Europe and North Africa, at a time when a *wagon-lit* was not considered proper transportation for a single woman, collecting, on behalf of the anthropologist Franz Boas, the medieval ballads and romances that had disappeared in Spain but which still remained current among the oldest of the Spanish Jews of Tangier; successfully resisted the romantic protestations of the editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in Paris; and was a friend of the Spanish poet-philosopher Miguel de Unamuno.

I myself was born in the International Zone of Tangier after my father, having married and started a family in New York, returned there as a foreign correspondent in 1912, covering the landing of the French in the small fishing village of Casablanca. By the time my father brought the family back to New York, I spoke a fine Spanish and English, and a weak French, but I am told that I spoke Arabic like a *tarrachito*, a Moorish urchin.

We lived first in an Irish neighborhood, across the street from a church and a parochial school whose pupils trounced me for my suspiciously broad accent, insisting I was British. Not long after, we moved to South Harlem, even then beginning to sink from its middle-class status. But it was during summers in the Rockaways, with its beaches and shops and vaudeville theaters and sauntering crowds, that I first became aware of the difference between being Jewish and being Spanish-Jewish.

There, almost everything was Jewish. Lillian Russell's mansion was now a Jewish rooming house, and a great estate nearby had been transformed into a Hebrew orphan asylum. The butcher, dairy, and grocery were all kosher (a word I did not recognize because we pronounced it *kashér*), and everyone on our block—as on other blocks in every direction—was Jewish. But how could they be, I asked myself, if they did not speak Spanish or know the significance of *Sefarad*?

THE KIDS I played with on the beach, inquisitive and tactless, had their own questions about me and my family: what did my father do, besides reading the *New York World* and various heavy tomes on the front porch on Sundays? And what was my religion?

My father, I told them, had been a newspaperman and was now in the import-export business; he also ran a translation service. To my friends, however, a newspaperman was a Gentile (and a drunkard), and import-export meant nothing. They regarded us as some alien species, unrelated to the Jews of Manhattan's Lower East Side or the Grand Concourse in the Bronx. As to our religion, they accepted the judgment of one aging grandmother who identified us as "*ketliks.*" My last name seemed to confirm this.

"So, what are you?"

"Jewish."

"G'wan. Say something in Yiddish."

"What's Yiddish?"

"Look, when your grandmother talks to your mother, what does she speak?"

"Spanish."

Meaningful looks. "You don't know Yiddish, how can you be Jewish?"

I consulted my father, a bad choice: he was a

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purist who scolded my mother when she started a sentence in one language and finished it in another. "Yiddish is not a language," my father ruled. "It's a dialect." This information did not increase my popularity with my friends, but at least I was able to explain that Spanish Jews did not know Yiddish. "All right," they retorted: "Say something in Jewish." "Do you mean Hebrew?"

I felt I would be on safe ground quoting the opening line of the *shema*, the "Hear, O Israel" prayer I had been taught to say every night after I was in bed and my mother had turned off the light. Unsure whether I might be blaspheming by uttering the prayer in broad daylight, I also threw in the blessing over wine which my father would recite on Friday evenings if we had guests for dinner.

My performance confused them, first because my pronunciation differed—broad *a* for their *o*, *t* for their *s*, a different system of emphasis—and secondly because, as it turned out, none of them knew the Friday-evening ritual. But in time they were willing to concede that I was perhaps a Jew—if only in a way that reaffirmed our differences: "Yeah, you're Jewish, but my father says you think you're better than we are."

Maybe they were right. Certainly we were more deeply schooled than many of them in the old traditions. For my friends, the Passover seder, universally celebrated among Jews of all descriptions, was just a big family gathering presided over by an ancient relative or a bachelor rabbi. For me, it was the happiest evening of the year, a family evening, during which my father would regularly interrupt the singing and the Passover story with jovial commentary, and would then be interrupted himself by the children competing to get the *bocados* (matzah and *haroset*—a paste of chopped nuts, fruit, and wine—wrapped in lettuce) into their mouths. Ironically, when I found myself at the seder of an Ashkenazi friend years later, it was I, and not my host, who was the stranger. When I tried to join in the singing and the responses, my credentials were challenged—"How do you know these things?"—as if saying *barúkh* instead of *bórukh* made me an outsider. This, I discovered, was an aspect of the Spanish Jew's own particular form of exile.

WHEN I reported my friends' comments to my father, he said, "Don't let it bother you. Your family never lived in a ghetto, and your ancestors wrote philosophical dissertations during the Golden Age in Spain. But we are all Jews, and when the sword falls, it strikes our necks as much as theirs."

Perhaps so. In the meantime, however, we remained busy with our distinctions—and, I should add, our subdistinctions.

In my teenage years, I would travel part of the way to school each day with my aunt—she going to DeWitt Clinton on Tenth Avenue, I to Ethical Culture at 63rd Street and Central Park West. Sometimes we would stop at the bridle path at Sixth Avenue to let a particular horseman cross into Central Park. "That man could have been your uncle," my aunt would say, naming a very rich German Jewish family. "He wanted to marry me, but I couldn't. It would have broken my mother's heart." One of my aunt's brothers had indeed married a German Jewish girl, whose family—supporters of the Reform congregation of Temple Emanu-El, where the dietary laws and the sanctity of the Sabbath were equally ignored—had made my grandmother miserable. To many in my family, Reform Jews were simply *alemanes*, Germans—hardly Jews at all, but rather practitioners of a local variant of Protestantism.

As for the East European Jews, that larger branch of the Ashkenazi tree that included the Litvaks and Galitzianers and all the rest, I can report that there was indeed a period in my youth when some in my family became involved with the "Second Avenue intellectuals." They included the editors of the Jewish daily *Forverts* ("Forward") and the Yiddish writers and poets and thinkers who sat in cafeterias for hours, holding forth eruditely and passionately on life and letters and looking down on Mahler and Schnitzler and other assimilated Viennese Jews who were neither fish nor fowl nor good pickled herring. I kindled to the *élan vital* of these people, to the energy and enthusiasm of their ideas; but their rhetoric and their Marxist reasoning grew out of an experience culturally alien to me. I could never understand what Judaism had to do with Marxism, and why questioning the latter was tantamount to being disloyal to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And so I grew up feeling that if Jews were somehow alien in America, Sephardi Jews were alien twice over, once in America and once among the Ashkenazim, of whatever subethnic origins, by whom they were outnumbered. But as if to

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compensate, and just as my aunt had predicted, things were different for me among *los cristianos*. I remember, in the 1950's, being introduced to the cultural attaché of the Spanish embassy in Washington. "Toledano? Toledano?" he asked. "*Sefardita?*" "*Sefardita de Toledo,*" I answered, and the attaché turned to the ambassador, remarking, "*Español puro.*"

These, it seemed, were more my people than Saul Bellow, Clifford Odets, or Sholem Aleichem. As an adult, I read the letters written to my aunt by Miguel de Unamuno, and felt with this Catholic poet a kinship I could not feel with those with whom I had eaten and argued on Second Avenue, or with whom, for that matter, I had worked during my years as an editor at the political weekly, the *New Leader*. When, in 1959, my friend and fellow journalist Earl Mazo walked with me across the muddy acres of what had been the Warsaw Ghetto, he wept, for this was where he had been born. In later years, I walked the streets of Toledo, feeling, unreasonably, that *I* was home.

AND YET. . . .

In Rome, not so long ago, when I tried to visit the synagogue in the old Jewish ghetto, I was stopped by the sexton. "The Sabbath service is going on," he said to me in Italian. "Why do you wish to enter?" "*Mi chiamo Toledano,*" I answered. He made a slight bow and said, "*Bene,*" in recognition, as if I had produced my family tree. But as it turned out, the services were being held in the basement, because an arsonist, oblivious of fine distinctions, had gutted the synagogue proper, making it impossible for Ashkenazim *or* Sephardim to worship in the grand hall above.

Just as my father had instructed me so many decades ago, when the sword falls, it strikes all necks alike.

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OBSERVATIONS

Who Deserves Asylum?

Mark Krikorian

IN A year in which questions have been raised about virtually every aspect of our immigration policies, there still appears to be a high degree of consensus on one time-honored American idea: giving shelter to those fleeing persecution abroad. Indeed, in a country with a history of welcoming refugees, it is hardly surprising that a magnanimous attitude toward such unfortunates should have deep roots in both the American mind and American law, captured in George Washington's dictum two centuries ago that the United States should be "an asylum to the oppressed and needy of the earth."

When the Senate passed an immigration bill in early May, amendments that would have tightened procedures in this area were voted down. But whatever happens in Congress, other developments are gathering force which place this aspect of our heritage under threat.

Our statute books, explicitly recognizing and reflecting our traditions, contain provisions that offer two paths to anyone who seeks the haven of our shores. The first is to come as a refugee. This entails applying from abroad, documenting the facts and circumstances that qualify one for refugee status, and waiting, sometimes years, until one's case is rejected or approved by U.S. immigration authorities. Numerical quotas set limits on how many refugees can come in a given year, and there is an ongoing debate over who should qualify. The second path is asylum, for which no numerical quotas exist. Winning asylum entails gaining entry to the United States by one means or another—legally or illegally, on a tourist visa or, perhaps, by climbing a fence from Mexico—and then, once here, lodging a documentable claim.

It is the second category that has lately become deeply problematic. Until about fifteen years ago, the number of applicants, in any given year, was rather small; virtually all were defectors from the Communist world, men and women who had taken sizable risks to escape from ruthless dictatorships. But what amounted to a mere handful in the 1950's and 60's grew to about 3,000 applications a year by the 1970's, expanded tenfold in the 1980's, and has recently mushroomed to approximately 140,000 annually. The backlog of unresolved cases is now 460,000. Whereas, in 1973, the first year for which such statistics are available, asylum was granted to 380 persons, in 1995 the total number was 12,477.

The increase can be explained in large measure by loopholes in our laws. A growing number of would-be immigrants have attempted to exploit our porous borders and lax procedures either to extend a stay in the United States while their application is being considered or simply to gain legal entry to the country and then, illegally, disappear. In

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this latter category have been a number of international terrorists, including, notoriously, Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, the Egyptian cleric who in 1993 helped plan the bombing of the World Trade Center, and Mir Aimal Kansi, a Pakistani national who in 1993 murdered two people outside the CIA's headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Cases such as these have spurred the Clinton administration to reconfigure the process by which asylum applicants are handled and evaluated, and in part also lay behind the attempt, voted down by the Senate, to impose new restrictions

BUT IF the institution of asylum is endangered by misuse, it is also being put at risk by another development, less visible but more profound. Over the past several years, our cultural and sexual wars have begun to extend into this corner of the law. A variety of pressure groups—on the Left, feminists and homosexual-rights campaigners; on the Right, anti-abortion activists—have been waging a battle to reshape the law so as to give sanctuary to their favored class of victims.

The provision at issue in the Immigration and Nationality Act offers protection only to aliens who can demonstrate that they have either been "persecuted" or have "a well-founded fear of persecution," due to their "race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion." It is these words which activists seek to broaden and reinterpret. The most visible and successful effort in this regard has been mounted by feminists, spearheaded by the Women Refugees Project, an advocacy group based at Harvard.

According to Nancy Kelly, the Project's director, American asylum law has historically been drawn too narrowly; it has "largely failed to recognize the political nature of seemingly private acts of harm to women." The Project's 1994 "Guidelines for Women's Asylum Claims" therefore redefine what is entailed by "membership in a particular social group"; what counts as an expression of "political opinion"; and what constitutes "persecution."

Thus, the Harvard guidelines suggest that, by virtue of the characteristic that unites them—a common gender—*all* women fit by definition into at least one of the five categories the law requires for a successful asylum claim: namely, membership in "a particular social group." Furthermore, "political opinion" should not be limited to criticism of one's government or any other form of dissenting speech, but should include a woman's "refusal or inability to conform to religious or cultural norms or the roles assigned to women in her country or culture." Finally, any woman who "opposes institutionalized discrimination against women," or who "expresses views of independence from the social or cultural dominance of men in her society," should be able to assert a claim based upon "persecution" or "fear of persecution" (provided, of course, such views are frowned upon in the country from which she hails).

One year after the Women Refugees Project published its guidelines, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the agency responsible for enforcing asylum law, issued a new set of internal instructions mirroring many of the Harvard group's interpretations and ideas. With these new instructions in place, a growing number of gender-related cases have been moving through the courts. Perhaps the most celebrated is that of Fauziya Kasinga, a native of Togo who arrived on a false passport, filed a claim for asylum based on her fear of being subjected to female genital mutilation, and was finally heard by the nation's highest immigration court, the Board of Immigration Appeals, on May 2 of this year, with the Clinton administration entering a plea on her behalf.

IF FEMINISTS have been making considerable headway in revising the way U.S. asylum law is conceived and carried out, so too have homosexual-rights campaigners. Up until 1990, aliens who admitted to homosexuality were formally barred by law from entering the country. That restriction was removed by the Immigration Act of 1990, and in 1994, Attorney General Janet Reno, who oversees the INS, formally ruled that a profession of homosexuality may, under certain circumstances, constitute *positive* grounds for asylum. In the wake of her decision, dozens of petitions have been lodged by homosexual men and women from various countries around the globe who find themselves on our soil; these claims, too, have been wending their way through the courts, and many are being upheld.

Finally, with sexual politics of the Left spilling over into asylum law, it was only a matter of time before the fray over abortion would also extend into this domain. Congressmen Henry Hyde (R-IL) and Chris Smith (R-NJ) have introduced legislation that would make "resistance to coercive population-control methods" grounds for asylum. And even without congressional action, claims based upon opposition to China's one-child-per-family policy have already been upheld in the courts.

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WHAT ARE the implications of these trends for the future? Thus far, it is true, the number of appeals in the newfangled categories of gender, sexual orientation, abortion, and the like has been small. But as word spreads among potential applicants abroad and immigration lawyers here at home, that is likely to change.

According to an estimate by the Department of State, 110 million women in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia have been subjected to the barbaric practice of female genital mutilation. Millions more will be subject to it in the years to come. Although the Kasinga case is the most notorious, it is hardly the first to be heard under this rubric: women from several African countries—including Nigeria, Gambia, Sierra Leone, and Ethiopia—have already made such claims, and if there is a ruling in Kasinga's favor, it will set a binding precedent for all other cases of this kind.

Then there is Islam. One-fifth of the world's women live in Muslim countries, where the wall separating mosque and state is either nonexistent or very thin, and where, by the standards of the West, women are not treated very well at all. Will they, too, now be eligible for asylum? In one recent case, asylum was granted to a Jordanian woman whose husband beat her after she allegedly behaved in a manner contrary to the customs of their faith. The judge deemed her a member of a "particular social group" facing persecution: namely, women in Islamic societies "who espouse Western values and who are unwilling to live their lives at the mercy of their husbands, their society, their government." The United States has not yet gone so far as Canada, which in 1993 awarded asylum to a Saudi woman who argued that she would face persecution if she were seen in public with her hair and face uncovered, but we may well be moving in that direction.

Then there is China, a country in which 600 million or so women have been obliged to conform to the regime's policy of one child per family. Late last year, an immigration judge granted asylum to a woman who belonged to the following persecuted social group: "Chinese women who find the one-child policy so abhorrent that they refuse to conform." Is this status to be extended in principle to millions of others as well?

As for homosexuals, although the total number who live in countries that ban and punish the practice is unknown, the INS is not standing still. In recent rulings, the agency has offered asylum to a homosexual from Brazil who claimed that persecution of HIV-positive men in that country was tantamount to "genocide"; to an Iranian national who revealed his homosexuality only after he left Iran; and to homosexuals from Turkey, Pakistan, and Venezuela, among other homophobic lands.

WHATEVER THE merits of any particular case, one thing is clear: by making a huge portion of the world's population eligible for asylum, we stand in danger of erasing all the distinctions which allowed our country to offer sanctuary in the past. In fact, far from broadening the protection America offers to the tormented of the earth, the new rulings may undermine the crucial ingredient of any successful asylum policy—namely, public support—and, ironically, lead to an unduly restrictive immigration policy in general.

This would be a most unfortunate result—though, it must be said, the prospect of it is unlikely to deter any of the groups pushing radical change. For many of them, the battle over asylum seems to have far less to do with giving shelter to persecuted individuals than with some larger quest to remake American legal norms and establish victim status for a number of officially recognized groups. In this respect, the push to enlarge asylum categories is but an extension into the immigration realm of an ideological thrust that, in other areas, has already wreaked untold havoc on our domestic social fabric. It is wrenching to think of the damage it may yet do to our noble tradition of offering "an asylum to the oppressed and needy of the earth."

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Music

A Tale of Two Mezzos

Terry Teachout

There was a time when a New York debut could be the most important moment in a musician's life. Leonard Bernstein, Jascha Heifetz, Kirsten Flagstad, Yehudi Menuhin, and any number of other artists whose names are now bywords became famous overnight thanks to this one event. Today, however, many careers are shaped less by noteworthy public appearances, in New York or elsewhere, than by the marketing strategies of record companies, working in tandem with public-relations firms.

To be sure, no record company has yet succeeded in using promotional techniques to turn a nonentity into a star, and even an up-and-coming musician can definitely be hurt by a *bad* public performance. The reputation of Roberto Alagna, aggressively touted by EMI as "the tenor of our generation," will not soon recover from his disastrous Metropolitan Opera debut this past season. Moreover, even if there are far fewer bona-fide stars today than in the 1960's, there is still no shortage of classical artists whom music-lovers will pay to hear. But there is also no getting around the fact that the culture of classical music has been altered by post-modern methods of marketing, and that some of the changes are clearly for the worse.

The nature of these changes can be seen by looking at the careers of two mezzo-sopranos who recently appeared in New York, the Italian Cecilia Bartoli and the Swedish Anne Sofie von Otter. In April, Bartoli sang her first Carnegie Hall recital, having made her Metropolitan Opera debut two months earlier as Despina in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*; also in April, von Otter had her New York recital debut at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall.

These performances were widely noticed in the New York press, and were the subject of much talk among opera buffs, both face to face and in cyberspace. But they did not make stars out of either singer. At twenty-nine, Bartoli is already a star—her top-selling albums for Decca/London have made her the most successful classical singer of her generation—while the forty-one-year-old von Otter, though she rarely performs in this country, is well known, here as in Europe, for her recordings of German, French, and Scandinavian art songs. These two singers thus appear, at first glance, to have much in common (besides their voice type): both are highly talented performers who spend more time singing recitals than appearing in opera, and their international reputations are based more on recordings than on public appearances.

But the resemblances stop there, and the differences—starting with the ways in which they have been promoted by their respective record labels—are far more revealing.

Born in Rome in 1966, Cecilia Bartoli began studying singing with her mother at sixteen, and made her professional debut at nineteen. Shortly thereafter, she came to the attention of the

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conductor Herbert von Karajan, who told key figures in the music business about her. Decca/London soon signed Bartoli to an exclusive contract, and released her first CD, a collection of Rossini arias, in 1989.[1]

At this point, Bartoli's stage career was limited, and (because her voice was modest in size) it was uncertain how much success she could hope to have in large-house opera. Even so, she was regarded as highly marketable to record buyers, not only on account of her talent but also because she was young and beautiful, the latter two qualities being prerequisites of today's youth-oriented marketing campaigns. She therefore spent the next few years concentrating mainly on recitals and concert appearances, and on her CD's, which were heavily promoted by Decca/London. Photographers created a sultry look for the singer, reminiscent of Italian film stars of the 50's, and the label produced a TV "documentary" based on one of her recitals which received, and continues to receive, worldwide circulation. Her CD's soon became top sellers, and by 1993 her recital fee had reportedly reached $35,000 a night.

It was Bartoli's success as a recording artist that made her a valuable operatic property. Indeed, by the time of her Metropolitan Opera debut this year, she had become a potent box-office draw. Although her Met debut was an auspicious occasion on several grounds—the company presented her in a new production of *Così fan tutte*, directed by Lesley Koenig, and surrounded her with a prestigious cast—the mezzo-soprano was the unquestioned star of the show. *Così* has never been a popular opera, but every performance this year was reportedly sold out well in advance.

As Bartoli's New York appearances showed, she is an artist of exceptional gifts. The smoky timbre of her voice is immediately recognizable, and she sings with an unselfconscious enthusiasm that is irresistible. Moreover, her ability to characterize what she sings is unparalleled in its clarity and immediacy: she is a true singing actress. As Despina in *Così*, she also proved that she is capable of fully expressing her personality within the tightly controlled context of an operatic production.

But Bartoli is by no means beyond reproach. Her much-praised coloratura, for example, has little in common with true *bel canto* style, in which legato, smoothness of tonal emission, is paramount. Indeed, Bartoli appears at times unable to sing legato at all—she invariably raps out her runs in a detached, staccato manner instead of "bowing" them like a violinist—and her low notes are forced. These habits are both tiring to the ear and vocally unhealthy, and may eventually do lasting physical damage.

THE MOST serious obstacle facing Bartoli is the smallness of her voice: at her Met debut, the conductor James Levine clearly had to go to some trouble to keep the orchestra from drowning her out. Though her Despina received deservedly excellent notices, it is unclear whether she will be able effectively to perform her signature Rossini roles (including Rosina in *The Barber of Seville*) in a Met-sized house. And while she has expressed interest in the title role of Bizet's *Carmen*, it is hard to see how she could sing so demanding a role in the theater without putting her voice at risk—or resorting to amplification.

Bartoli's recital programs are also problematic, though for a different reason: they are unadventurous even for an opera singer. This is due partly to the fact that she performs almost exclusively in Italian (in which there is no significant art-song literature), and partly to the fact that she has been slow to expand her repertoire. A case in point was her April recital at Carnegie Hall, where she was accompanied by the concert pianist András Schiff.

The program, drawn from Bartoli's CD's, consisted of a group of second-rate songs by Beethoven and Schubert, which she sings solely because they happen to be in Italian; a half-dozen Rossini songs, all familiar from earlier recitals; and a solo cantata by Haydn, "Arianna a Naxos," which was of interest chiefly as a vehicle for her mercurial stage presence.[2] Although anyone who had never before seen or heard Bartoli might well have found this recital remarkable, even revelatory, it broke no new ground for her, and certainly posed no challenges for Schiff, a superb musician whose formidable abilities were largely wasted as a result.

In the end, the key to understanding Bartoli's career lies in the fact that she began recording at the age of twenty-two, when her voice was not yet mature, and when most twenty-two-year-old American singers (by way of contrast) have just begun graduate study or, in rare cases, have entered apprenticeship programs with opera companies. This explains virtually everything about Bartoli, from her eccentric technique to her restricted recital repertoire: she went before the public too soon, and has thus been forced to grapple, in public and under high pressure, with the ordi-

[1] London 425 430-2LH.

[2] "Arianna a Naxos" and the Beethoven and Schubert songs are available on *The Impatient Lover*, recorded with Schiff in 1992 (London 440 297-2DH); the Rossini songs can be heard on *Rossini Recital* (London 430 518-2LH), recorded in 1990.

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nary problems of inexperience. Aggravating matters still further is the fact that she is under contract to a record label whose marketing model is Luciano Pavarotti, a fine tenor who has long handled himself less as an artist than as a salable commodity.

It is possible, of course, that Bartoli will surmount the obstacles created by her premature stardom, and ripen into the truly great singer she has it in her to become. But it is unlikely that in the meantime her handlers will encourage her to do anything inconsistent with the short-term goal of selling her services to the largest possible paying audiences, whether or not that goal is itself consistent with her best artistic interests.

THAT THERE continue to be roads to success in classical music other than the one chosen by Cecilia Bartoli is shown by the career of Anne Sofie von Otter.

Born in 1955, von Otter graduated from the Stockholm College of Music in 1979, and spent a further period of study at London's Guildhall School of Music and Drama before making her opera-house debut. She signed a recording contract with DGG in 1987, and her first solo CD, a recital of songs by Hugo Wolf and Gustav Mahler, was released to critical acclaim in 1989—around the same time as Cecilia Bartoli's debut CD for Decca/London, though von Otter was then eleven years older.[3]

Like Bartoli, von Otter is equally comfortable in opera and recital. Her 1995 Metropolitan Opera performances as Octavian in Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier* rank among the most vivid and memorable pieces of comic operatic acting I have seen.[4] (In this respect, she is reminiscent of the American mezzo-soprano Frederica von Stade, who also has a flair for comedy unexpected in a singer whose voice is essentially "serious" in timbre.) And her Alice Tully Hall recital, in which she sang art songs by Schubert, Strauss, Grieg, and a group of Swedish composers, left no doubt whatsoever that she is a singing actress of the first rank, fully worthy of comparison not merely with her younger counterpart but with such great recitalists of the recent past as the baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau; the Schubert group in particular was miraculously varied in dramatic expression.

Unlike Bartoli, however, von Otter is an able linguist—in addition to her native Swedish, she sings in German, French, Italian, English, Russian, Finnish, and Norwegian—and her repertoire is vast. She is also one of the most technically finished singers of the last quarter-century. Her smooth-textured lyric mezzo voice is produced with unusual evenness, and while she does not specialize in coloratura roles, her work in that mode, which can be heard in a 1989 recording of the French-language version of Gluck's opera *Orfeo et Euridice*, is impressively secure.[5]

Moreover, von Otter has deliberately chosen not to ride the fast track to stardom. Though she has sung at most of the major opera houses, she is particular about the conditions under which she works, and will only commit herself to well rehearsed productions. Just as important, her fastidious career choices are fully supported by her record label.

DGG is as committed to modern promotional techniques as any other record company, but it is also known for the care it takes in adding artists—especially younger ones—to its roster, and for its willingness to record them in non-frivolous repertoire. And while von Otter is a strikingly handsome woman, DGG has never sought to market her as the Swedish equivalent of an Italian sex kitten: in ads she is always pictured as an artist of high seriousness.

This approach has allowed von Otter to grow at her own pace, and in the process to create a body of recorded work that has won the near-universal admiration of critics and colleagues. While she will probably never become a "superstar"—the technical perfection of her singing, and the emotional restraint characteristic of her recorded performances, are not qualities that tend to inspire hysterical adulation among opera buffs—she is now generally regarded as one of the world's finest classical singers, and the warm audience response at her New York recital suggested that wider popularity may yet be within her grasp.

TO SAY that Anne Sofie von Otter is a "better" singer than Cecilia Bartoli is to make a meaningless comparison. Both women are greatly gifted, and have done much with their gifts. But von Otter has made the wiser choices, and her long-term prospects consequently seem far more secure. She is likely to have another two decades or so of first-rate singing ahead of her, and it

[3] DGG 423 666-2GH. Von Otter's other recital CD's for DGG, all of which are accompanied by the pianist Bengt Forsberg, her regular recital partner, include discs devoted to songs by Brahms (429 727-2GH), Schumann (445 881-2GH), and Grieg (437 521-2GH); *Love's Twilight*, a collection of songs by Alban Berg, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, and Richard Strauss (437 515-2GH); and the newly released *Wings in the Night*, a collection of songs by Swedish composers (449 189-2GH). Also noteworthy are *Speak Low: Songs by Kurt Weill*, in which von Otter gives a performance of the Brecht-Weill "Seven Deadly Sins" that is both convincingly idiomatic and refreshing in its lack of exaggeration (439 894-2GH); and *Anne Sofie von Otter Sings Berlioz*, which includes the best modern recording of the orchestral song cycle *Les Nuits d'été* (445 823-2GH).

[4] Von Otter's Octavian can be both seen and heard in a televised version of a 1994 Vienna Staatsoper production conducted by Carlos Kleiber (DGG 440 072 543-3GVK, two videocassettes).

[5] EMI CDCB 49834 (two CD's).

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is no less likely that her artistry will continue to deepen with the passage of time; Bartoli's career, by contrast, could easily be cut short by a vocal crisis, or descend into the kind of marketing-driven triviality she has so far managed, for the most part, to avoid.

Of course it would be unfair to blame Bartoli's situation wholly, or even primarily, on her record label. She signed with Decca/London of her own free will, and her failure to expand her repertoire, or restudy her vocal technique, is nobody's fault but her own. But when a young singer yields to temptation, a certain portion of blame properly attaches to the tempter: one can only expect so much sense out of a twenty-two-year-old. And finally, whether talented young people, be they Italian mezzo-sopranos, basketball-playing ghetto teenagers, or seven-year-old airplane "pilots," make the right choices in life also depends in large part on the priorities of the larger culture they inhabit.

Therein lies the moral of this tale of two mezzos: if the career of Cecilia Bartoli is any indication, the priorities of the postmodern culture of classical music are seriously askew. For it is Bartoli's career, not von Otter's, that is increasingly the preferred paradigm for the "development" of young classical artists. The marketing of Roberto Alagna, for example, was demonstrably modeled on that of Bartoli, and many instrumentalists—most recently the violinists Sarah Chang and Leila Josefowicz and the pianist Evgeny Kissin—are also being put before the public at younger and younger ages. Not coincidentally, much the same thing is happening to the current generation of young jazz musicians, with similar results.

There have always been, and will always be, prodigies. But "too much, too soon" means something very different in 1996 from what it did in 1927, when the eleven-year-old Yehudi Menuhin made his New York Philharmonic debut. As it was, Menuhin barely survived his days as the most celebrated prodigy of the pre-TV era. Today, the effects of a musical career prematurely launched in the full glare of the modern media spotlight are potentially more devastating than ever before.

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Books in Review

The X-Files

At a Century's Ending:
Reflections 1982-1995
by George F. Kennan
Norton. 351 pp. $27.50

Reviewed by
Gabriel Schoenfeld

TWENTIETH-CENTURY American intellectual life has witnessed more than a handful of extraordinary political odysseys connected with the USSR. In the most familiar pattern—exemplified by, among others, Whittaker Chambers, Sidney Hook, and James Burnham—a period of intense and youthful devotion to the Communist cause is followed by equally intense disillusionment, and then by a shift toward some new resting point on the ideological spectrum, quite often to the Right of the political divide.

One American intellectual who has moved in a different and quite peculiar direction is George F. Kennan, the distinguished American diplomat who has spent the past 40 years—he is now in his nineties—engaged in scholarly pursuits at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. His latest book, a collection of essays and speeches written primarily during the USSR's final years, makes manifest the strange byway down which he has walked.

We meet the man at both ends of his long pilgrimage in *At a Century's Ending*; in effect, we meet two George F. Kennans. The first—a brilliantly evocative eyewitness of contemporary history, and a stern proponent of resoluteness toward the Soviet Union—appears in chapters which bring us back to some key moments in his diplomatic career.

Thus, writing in the present tense, he recreates here the atmosphere in Moscow in 1937, when Stalin's show trials were in full swing. Kennan was then serving as an aide to the new American ambassador, Joseph Davies, "a shallow and politically ambitious man who knows nothing about Russia." Together the two Americans attended the trials—"the visible tip of the immense iceberg of terror and cruelty that is now crushing Soviet society."

> I, sitting next to him, whisper into his ear what I can of the proceedings. He understands nothing of what is really going on. He even thinks the accused are genuinely guilty of the preposterous charges to which they are confessing, and he sententiously pronounces this opinion, during the intermission, to the assembled American journalists. But I do know what is going on; and the sight of these ashen, doomed men, several of them only recently prominent figures of the regime but now less than 24 hours away from their executions—the sight of these men standing there mumbling their preposterous confessions in the vain hope of saving themselves, or perhaps, members of their families, from disaster, the sight of their twitching lips, their prison pallor, their evasive, downcast eyes—is never to leave my memory.

Almost ten years later, in the winter of 1946, Kennan returned to Moscow to assume the second rank-

GABRIEL SCHOENFELD, *associate editor of* COMMENTARY, *writes widely on Russian affairs.*

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ing position in the embassy. A cable arrived from Washington expressing bafflement at Stalin's uncooperative policy in the wake of World War II. "[F]illed with impatience and disgust at this naiveté," Kennan writes, again recreating the scene in hindsight, "I sit down and draft a preposterously long telegram . . . describing, as though in a primer for schoolchildren, the nature, the ambitions, the calculations" of the men running the Soviet Union and the internal forces that made them seek "security only in patient but deadly struggle for total destruction of rival power." This "long telegram"—distributed widely within the foreign-policy machinery of the government, and compulsory reading for senior military officers up and down the chain of command—would have a profound impact on the official U.S. view of the USSR.

The following year, Kennan, now in Washington in a senior State Department slot, presented his bleak vision of the Communist danger to the broader public, together with a proposal for dealing with it. Writing in *Foreign Affairs* under the pseudonym "X," he offered a strategy of "firm containment designed to confront the Russians with unalterable counterforce at every point where they show signs of encroaching upon the interest of a peaceful and stable world." Kennan's article, "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," became perhaps the single most influential document of postwar American foreign policy, the intellectual scaffolding of the doctrine of containment.

IF *At a Century's Ending* offers a capsule introduction to Kennan's career as cold warrior, it also provides more than an ample glimpse of his outlook 40 years on. By the 1980's, as these essays make clear, his view of the world had come full circle, and even a few odd degrees beyond that. He was still an advocate of containment—no longer, however, of the USSR, but of a country he had come to regard as even more dangerous to peace on earth, namely, the United States.

Thus, in an essay written during the third year of the Reagan administration, Kennan saw the U.S. as driven by inexorable and dangerous internal forces very much like those he had perceived in the Soviet Union in 1947. One such internal force was the American military, "an establishment," as he puts it here, "largely outside the perimeter of democratic control." So "institutionalized" was the U.S. commitment to the arms race that the government was "very little responsive to public opinion or indeed to external pressures of any sort." Indeed, the situation in this country had deteriorated to the point where the entire Soviet-American relationship bore the "familiar characteristics, the unfailing characteristics, of a march toward war—that and nothing else."

If pressures in the United States were drawing the world toward Armageddon, the Soviet Union, by contrast, now possessed, in Kennan's updated judgment, more benevolent intentions than we had been led by our journalists, politicians, and generals to believe. "What is called 'Soviet behavior,'" he argued in another essay from the 1980's reprinted in *At a Century's Ending*, "is, in far higher degree than seems to be realized in Washington, a reaction by the leaders of that country to the manner in which we ourselves treat them"—which under the Reagan administration, with the President bent on forcing the Soviet leaders "to cry uncle," was not very well at all. Instead of regarding the Soviet Union with a measure of respect and understanding, instead of recognizing that the Soviet leadership—Leonid Brezhnev and his associates—were "God's creatures, embodying both good and bad," we exaggerated their propensity to do evil, and thus a "forbidding image [was] assiduously built up and nurtured," merely to provide a justification for those in the United States determined to acquire ever larger quantities of arms.

HOW TO account for the great intellectual distance traversed by Kennan from the early days of the cold war to the 1980's, and beyond? He, for one, insists that it is no distance at all. His outlook, he writes, has not changed; rather, his views were misinterpreted from the start.

Take the key term "containment." This, he asserts, is a notion he employed "lightheartedly"; his aim was never to hem in the USSR with military power, but merely to promote "political negotiation," "accommodation," and "sensible compromise" in order to overcome "misunderstandings" that had arisen between the United States and the Soviet Union during World War II. And as for his "long telegram," all he will say now is that "I seem to have aroused a strain of emotional and self-righteous anti-Sovietism that in later years I will wish I had not aroused."

But the pronouncements of the second Kennan are—to use one of his own favorite words—preposterous, and historical revisionism of the most blatant and disreputable sort. Like many of his recent statements about America and the USSR, they also present a riddle: how to reconcile the two George Kennans, the wise and the fatuous one? No obvious key to that riddle can be found in this collection of essays, and perhaps there is none. To judge by the shifts and modulations within these pages alone, the tendencies exist coterminously, untrammeled by self-contradictions and irreconcilable facts.

On one point, to be sure, Kennan is correct. His disagreements with America's course in the cold war can indeed be traced as far back as the late 1940's, when he resigned from the government. But his thoughtfully framed criticisms in those years hardly resemble the crude, cliché-ridden theses he would come to

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advance during the 1980's—as when, for example, he insisted (in 1987) that if

> the Soviet Union [were] to sink tomorrow under the waters of the ocean, the American military-industrial complex would have to remain, substantially unchanged, until some other adversary could be invented.

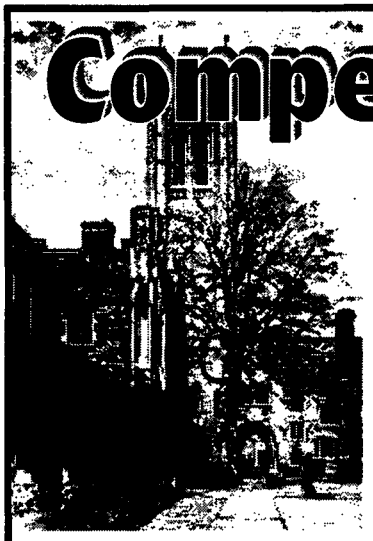
The Soviet Union did, in effect, sink under the waters of the ocean; and the American military budget was pared, in constant dollars, by almost half—but without the slightest dent being made in Kennan's disputation with his country.

If few clues to the Kennan conundrum are contained in *At a Century's Ending*, one plausible solution to the mystery may be suggested by an earlier book, *Around the Cragged Hill* (1993), an attempt at elaborating "a personal and political philosophy." In that work as in this one, Kennan mixes many sage observations with a good number of quirky, cranky ones. He warns, for example, of an impending water shortage in the United States. Soil, too, he forecasts direly, is in short supply. The automobile is the "enemy of community"; discount postal rates for "junk mail" amount to a "monstrous distortion of burdens"; and advertising "constitutes a massive abuse of the capacity for concentrated thought on the part of countless millions of people."

Modernity itself, American-style, discontents Kennan. He suffers, he has said, from "discomfort" with the 20th century, and owns to an "inherited partiality" for the 18th. In particular, he seems to feel that, with the expansion of social equality after World War II, something of great value in our civilization has been squandered and irrevocably lost. One institution "of particular importance" for which he pines is domestic service—"I cannot somehow picture Tocqueville combining his serene meditations with the washing of pots and the removal of trash from the kitchen premises"—but his discomfort extends all the way from the daily horror of washing dishes to basic questions about the direction of American society. "We must ask ourselves," he writes in *At a Century's Ending*,

> what sort of example is going to be set . . . by a country that finds itself unable to solve such problems as drugs, crime, decay of the inner cities, declining educational levels, a crumbling material substructure, and a deteriorating environment.

Finally, Kennan seems to harbor a profound mistrust of democracy, a mistrust tinged with personal bitterness. That bitterness, it would appear, is born of our political system's refusal to listen to and heed



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his words. In recent years, he has repeatedly proposed that we alter our constitutional order and establish a council of experts charged with dispassionately examining problems which the federal government is not capable of coping with well—above all, arms control.

The elite body Kennan envisions would be charged with responsibility for telling "both legislative and executive branches of the government the things they *must* do, whether they like it or not" (his emphasis). In addition to imparting a "sober and deliberative voice," such a council would offer a useful place and role for the "elder statesmen" of our country "who are found in some abundance . . . but whose experience, as things now stand, goes largely wasted."

Hell, it may be, hath no fury like an elder statesman ignored.

AS A DIPLOMAT, there can be no question that George F. Kennan made a significant contribution to the security of our country at a particularly parlous moment. As the author of a shelf-ful of historical books, some of them excellent, he has added much to our understanding of Russia in the modern era. As a writer, he is a master of a certain manner and style (and he displays that mastery in a number of remarkably powerful essays in this book). By virtue of these considerable accomplishments, he long ago gained a solid reputation with the public and the respect—better, the adulation—of many in the opinion-making elite. But the outlandish pronouncements that punctuate *At a Century's Ending* and other works are not merely the eccentricities of an aging, cultivated reactionary. Precisely because of Kennan's indubitable accomplishments, precisely because of the authority attached to him as the architect of containment, they must be taken seriously, and seriously dismissed.

For, suppose we had listened to this venerable wise man's pleas for one-sided disarmament; his entreaty to admit the Soviet leadership into polite society; his insistence that America itself had to be perfected or remade before it would deserve to be defended from its enemies. The world today, it is safe to say, would in all likelihood be a very different and more dangerous place.

To our immense good fortune, the cold war came to an end, and on terms that Kennan—at least in his second incarnation—neither wished for nor predicted: namely, American triumph and Soviet disintegration. One might argue, therefore, that as his declarations turned out to be largely inconsequential, they might easily be overlooked or forgiven. But it is not easy to overlook the damage Kennan has done and continues to do to the cause of historical truth—no trivial charge against a professional historian. And it is not easy to forgive the spectacle of a man dispensing opinions no less wrong, and no less "sententiously pronounce[d]," than those of Ambassador Davies in 1937, thereby besmirching a brilliant and illustrious page of 20th-century biography: to wit, his own.

Middleman

They Only Look Dead: Why Progressives Will Dominate the Next Political Era

by E.J. Dionne, Jr.

Simon & Schuster. 352 pp. $24.00

Reviewed by
Ronald Radosh

IN HIS last book, *Why Americans Hate Politics* (1991), E.J. Dionne, a columnist for the *Washington Post*, and one of our most thoughtful political commentators, took issue with both contemporary liberalism and contemporary conservatism and attempted to articulate a new middle ground. His belief, on the one hand, in the desirability of a vigorous public sector—big government—put him in opposition to conservatives of most stripes. His aversion, on the other hand, to the "anti-democratic impulses" reflected in multiculturalism, radical feminism, and the like sharply separated him from the liberal mainstream. Between the two poles, Dionne attempted to delineate a renewed liberalism that would rescue itself from irrelevance by learning "the many lessons that conservatism has to teach about the value of tradition, value, and community." Dionne, in short, was mapping out the very path Bill Clinton attempted to walk as he campaigned for the presidency in 1992 as a "new Democrat."

Four years and nearly one complete term of the Clinton administration have passed since *Why Americans Hate Politics* was published, and Dionne's position has evolved. In his new book, instead of offering a prescription for repairing liberalism, he has abandoned the term altogether, evidently accepting the conclusion that the "L-word" has become synonymous in the public mind with bureaucracy, big government, and failed social experiments. Now he embraces "progressivism"—a term with more neutral associations and also with roots in America's past. Not only does he provide an outline of "progressive" politics, but he boldly argues the case for the prediction set forth in his subtitle: "progressives will dominate the next political era."

Dionne deploys a wide reading in America's past to explain and defend this somewhat counterintuitive proposition. Relying on a cyclical view of American history, he likens present-day Republicans to the party of the late-19th-century Robber Barons, and describes Newt Gingrich and his crowd as advocates

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RONALD RADOSH *is the author of* Divided They Fell: The Demise of the Democratic Party: 1964-1996, *to be published by the Free Press in August.*

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of a "Gilded Age conservatism dressed up in the finery of a high-tech age." But just as the Gilded Age was followed by a progressive era, it is, Dionne writes, only a matter of time before the pendulum swings again and America reenters a period marked by the "careful but active use of government to temper markets and enhance individual opportunities."

For evidence of this new dawning, Dionne turns to the successes (and the failures) of Bill Clinton. Clinton campaigned for the presidency stressing themes that lie at the center of the new politics Dionne favors—the intelligent use of government to improve the public weal. His victory at the polls, however narrow, showed that an electoral coalition could still be forged to stand behind such a program.

But Clinton's presidency, as Dionne concedes, illustrates not merely the potential for a new politics but also the pitfalls that might derail it. For one thing, the administration's policy initiatives have been repeatedly hijacked by the left wing of the Democratic party. Thanks to pressure from that direction, Clinton's promise "to end welfare as we know it"—a pledge which had broad political appeal—has gone unfulfilled. His effort to reform health care also ended in failure, and of a more spectacular sort: instead of working toward incremental change, the President adopted a maximalist approach and succumbed to the temptation to redesign the entire health-care industry from the ground up. The result, of course, was a disastrous political setback for the Democratic party in the November 1994 congressional elections.

Ironically, however, the failings of the Clinton administration give Dionne reason for hope. The middle ground he is fighting for remains uncontested and can still be gained. The Democrats could still seize the moment by responding to the needs of what he calls the "Anxious Middle"—the silent majority that wants (he believes) not less but more effective government. What progressives need do is embrace policies that foster both "liberty and community," while also taking into consideration the "neoconservative challenge to liberalism"—by which Dionne appears to mean the recognition that aside from the obligations of our government to its citizens, there are limits to its reach as well.

Much of what Dionne has to say sounds eminently sensible. But there is one obvious problem: the liberals whom he now labels "progressive" seem entirely oblivious to his call, and the Democratic party as a whole

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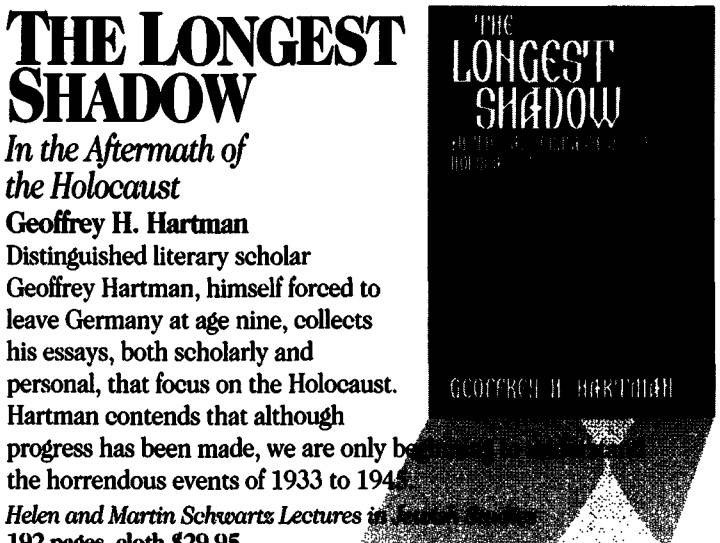

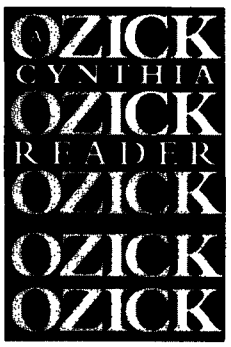

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remains mired in failed ideas and policies. Bill Clinton's difficulties with the party's left wing—on welfare, health-care reform, and other critical issues ranging from trade to crime—have hardly occurred by accident. There is, rather, a long list of matters on which the party appears locked into positions very far from what Dionne's Anxious Middle could plausibly be said to want.

Affirmative action is one such issue, and it is a significant failing that it goes undiscussed in Dionne's book. Divisions over the ill-conceived policy of racial preferences have already done a great deal of damage to the Democrats and their electoral prospects, in particular by driving the so-called angry white males from the party's ranks. The California Civil Rights Initiative (CCRI), which puts the future of affirmative action before the voters in a referendum this fall, is likely to have tremendous implications for the outcome of the presidential election in a key battleground state. Not a word about any of this gets mentioned here, even though—or perhaps because—affirmative action has given liberalism (or "progressivism") a very bad name.

This is not to say that Dionne does not have many pertinent observations to offer about the contradictions of contemporary American politics, and interesting comparisons to draw between our current dilemma and other moments in our past. Some of his policy prescriptions appear reasonable; vouchers for education is one, though again it is an idea unlikely to kindle enthusiasm among today's "progressives"—on the contrary, it is a proposal dear to many conservative hearts. There is, in sum, little real evidence here that a new era is aborning. "Progressives" may only look dead, as Dionne suggests in the title of his interesting book, but this may also be a case where appearances are not, in the end, deceiving.

Out of the Past: 1

Memoirs: All Rivers Run to the Sea
by Elie Wiesel
Knopf. 432 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
Elliott Abrams

EVER SINCE the publication of *Night* in 1958 (English edition, 1960), Elie Wiesel has occupied an almost hallowed position in the moral imagination of our time, beyond the reach of most criticism. As an American, moreover, and especially as one who moves within the precincts of the American Jewish community, he has remained astonishingly above the fray, unaffected by the usual political, organizational, and denominational divisions and rivalries.

What explains this? Addressing that question may not have been Wiesel's purpose in writing *All Rivers Run to the Sea*, but this urbane, moving, discursive memoir of his youth and early maturity does provide an answer, or at least some clues to one.

WIESEL'S NARRATIVE, which closes in 1969 with his marriage at the age of forty-one, is divided into ten segments, each corresponding to a different episode in his life. In truth, though, it consists of three main parts: before, during, and after the Holocaust.

The chapter on Wiesel's childhood lovingly evokes his Orthodox upbringing, capturing the provincial rhythms of life in the Hungarian town of Sighet where he was born in 1928. Of his boyhood environs he writes that

> everything aroused my curiosity: a beggar who might be a *tzaddik*, a just man, in disguise; an abandoned wife scouring the province for the hundred rabbinical signatures that would allow her to remarry; a rich trader gone bankrupt; a novelist whose book described the turmoil in heaven when the Angel of Death went on strike; an apostate excommunicated by the community.

His idyll ended in 1944, when the Jews of Sighet were rounded up and deported to Auschwitz. Wiesel has written and spoken so often of his experiences in the death camp that one may legitimately wonder whether anything more can be said—but, as he himself might put it, when it comes to the Holocaust no details are trivial. His lines here about his younger sister Tsiporah, his beloved "Tsipouka," who died in Auschwitz, are colored by a sense of loss that is still clearly felt. Wiesel last saw her as the cattle car bearing his family reached its destination. "It took me a long time," he writes,

> to convince myself I was not somehow mistaken. I have checked with others who arrived that same night, consulted documents of the *Sonderkommandos*, and yes, a thousand times yes: unable to "handle" such a large number of Hungarian Jews in the crematoria, the killers were not content merely to incinerate children's dead bodies . . . they cast living Jewish children into specially tended furnaces.

In this book, as elsewhere, Wiesel offers no "explanation" for Jewish suffering, acknowledging that "the questions I once asked myself about God's silence remain open." But even lacking such an understanding, he rejects the view, prominently associated with his fellow survivor Primo Levi, that the horrors of the Holocaust make sincere belief untenable. On the contrary, Wiesel writes, "I had seen too much suffering to break with the past and reject the heritage of those who had suffered." His faith, then, is as much a matter of solidarity as of belief. And solidarity also emerges here as

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the central theme of his public life.

There is, to begin with, solidarity with the victims of the Holocaust, whose stories he has so often told. Wiesel cannot abide those who chastise the murdered for their alleged "passivity," and he is just as impatient with facile criticisms of those who managed to survive and then turned their talents to such mundane tasks as making money. Who is to judge them? he asks. It is, rather, their rejection of nihilism and despair, their confidence in themselves and in the future, that deserve our respect and even our wonder.

Then there is Wiesel's unwavering solidarity with Israel, and with the Zionist project. After the war, liberated from Buchenwald and given a permit to live in France, he worked in Paris as a journalist for a Yiddish newspaper affiliated with the Irgun. This tie with the organization of Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir may come as news to some readers, but it is a fact that in the early years Wiesel was far closer to Herut and the Revisionist Zionists than to the Laborites of David Ben-Gurion. Indeed, Wiesel's initial sympathy for the Right in Israeli politics may also help explain why, after 1977, when Begin and then Shamir took power and many intellectuals in the West turned their backs on Israel, he stood his ground unfailingly.

Wiesel is protective not only of Israel but of Jewry as a whole. He long lent his voice to the cause of Soviet Jews, returning from a trip to the USSR in 1965 as a "messenger of the living" and then going on to tell what he saw in *The Jews of Silence* (1966). He even aims to protect Jews from other Jews—including from himself. "The enemy," he writes, "has heaped enough abuse on . . . Jews without my adding to it." And he notes at the beginning of this volume that "certain events will be omitted, especially . . . those that might damage the Jewish people."

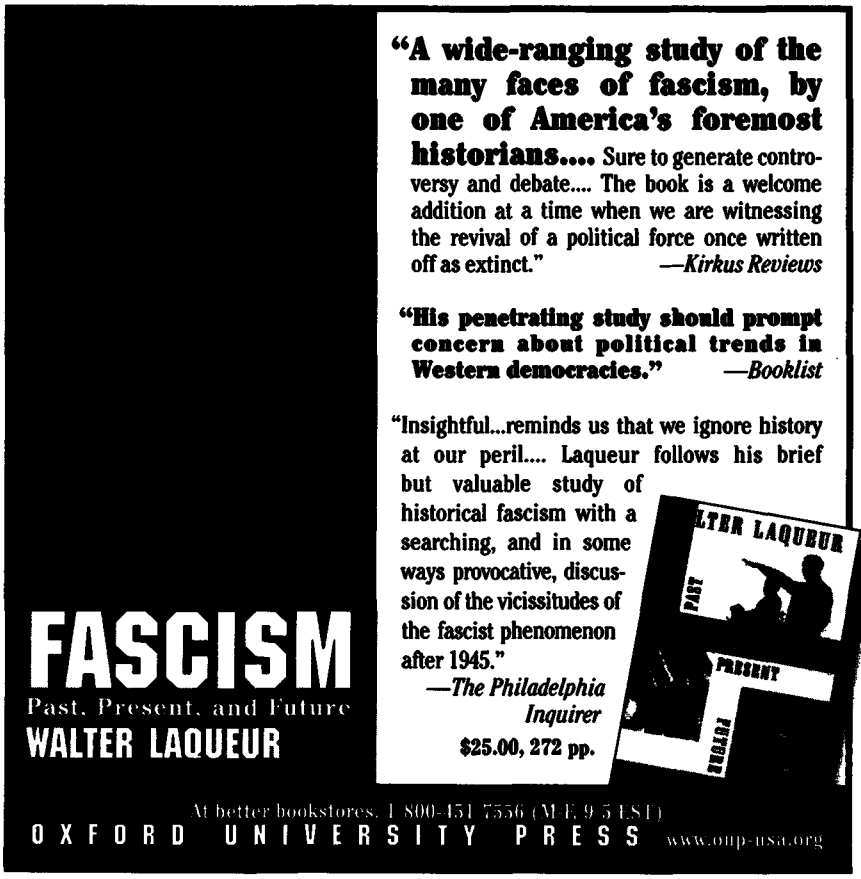
These feelings of protectiveness can take surprising forms. Wiesel is, for example, even made uneasy by the fictional portraits of prewar Polish Jews that he finds in the work of Isaac Bashevis Singer: "morally deficient . . . perverse . . . sex maniacs." And what is his complaint about Singer's often nasty behavior toward other Jewish writers? "Lack of solidarity."

WIESEL'S FIERCE condemnation both of the persecutors of Jews and of those indifferent to their plight arises from this same sense of Jewish solidarity. His indictment begins, of course, with the Nazis and their collaborators; it extends to the Western powers who, right after the war, forced survivors to live in "misery and humiliation" as displaced persons, often in their old concentration camps; and—in a rare departure from his policy of not criticizing his co-religionists—it includes those Jews who, safely ensconced in the West or British Palestine, did nothing to awaken the Jews of Europe to their peril. "The truth," he writes,

> is that some Jews in Sighet could have escaped the ghetto . . . . It was April 1944, just a few weeks before the Allied landing in Normandy, but the Jews of Sighet had not been informed of the ramifications of the Final Solution. The free world, including Jewish leaders in America and Palestine, had known since 1942, but we knew nothing. Why didn't they warn us? . . . Why did the Jews of the free world act as they did?

This question, which Wiesel posed in a COMMENTARY article at the time of the Eichmann trial,* aroused the ire of many of his fellow Jews, who argued in response that "the world was at war." But Wiesel

* "Eichmann's Victims and the Unheard Testimony," December 1961.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was not persuaded, and he asks it again here.

All Rivers Run to the Sea is not, however, simply a tale of tragedy, and certainly not one of recrimination. Wiesel writes touchingly of the long years he spent in Paris and then New York, scraping by as an unknown journalist. He also draws sketches of the people he has loved and admired, from the scholar Abraham Joshua Heschel, to his mysterious mentor "Shushani" (Mordecai Rosenbaum), to Israeli leaders like Golda Meir and Yitzhak Rabin, to a variety of figures in the intellectual and literary worlds in Israel, France, and the United States.

There was a time, indeed, in the early decades after the war, when Wiesel aspired to be a full-fledged member of the last-named company—to become an intellectual on the French model, or to make his mark in the world of fiction. These were the same years in which he had imposed on himself a vow of silence concerning what he had witnessed and undergone during the war; the reason, he says, was fear of letting "what I bore within me like poison" spill free.

But it becomes plain here why those ambitions did not suit him. Among his differences with the literary critic Alfred Kazin, he observes, is his conception of the writer's task:

> For [Kazin] literature is an end in itself. Not for me. I don't believe in art for art's sake. For me literature must have an ethical dimension. The aim of the literature I call testimony is to disturb.

Like any recipe for art, this one is certainly no guarantee of great writing, and Wiesel's own efforts may fail the test of enduring literary excellence. But that is not the point. For him, the purpose of writing is "to plead for the dead, to defend their memory and honor." He intends his work as a memorial to Jewish suffering, and as a testament to Jewish survival: "to revive lost fragments of existence, to rescue lost beings . . . to combat oblivion, and to reject death." Once his term of self-imposed silence had passed, this became the unifying theme of his writing, as it did of his public life; and so it remains.

As a novelist Wiesel has his artistic shortcomings, but he is a man who emerged from the camps—"by chance," he insists—with one overpowering mission from which he has never wavered. In other books, he has amply testified to the horrors he witnessed in his young manhood. But as this memoir shows, he emerged from that darkness not with a sense of futility, resignation, or hatred but rather with a renewed love for and sense of protectiveness toward his people. It is this that explains his unique position among Jews, and beyond.

Out of the Past: 2

Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew

by John Felstiner

Yale. 344 pp. $30.00

Reviewed by
Hillel Halkin

THERE IS a story about James Joyce and *Finnegans Wake*, at a glance the most incomprehensible work of fiction ever produced by a major author. When a frustrated admirer protested that it would take him ten years to understand the book, Joyce is said to have replied, "Ten years? I demand my reader's whole life."

Few of us, however, have even ten years to spare; and although *Finnegans Wake*, with the help of critical commentaries, can be read nowadays on a reduced time budget, our frustration remains and can be formulated in two questions. Practically speaking, why bother struggling with a putatively great work of art that is so uncooperative about yielding its secrets? And on a more theoretical level, can an art work, however caringly or cunningly constructed, be judged anything but a failure if, in and of itself, it offers an audience no apparent means of grasping its content and structure?

Although never explicitly posed by him, these questions hover over John Felstiner's literary biography of Paul Celan. Deemed by many critics to be one of the great poets of our time and by many readers to be largely unapproachable, Celan forces us to ponder the relation between art and communication, between the inner world of the artist and the outer one of his society.

Born Paul Antschel in 1920, Celan grew up in a German-speaking, semi-traditional Jewish home in Czernowitz, the capital of Bukovina, a province of the Austro-Hungarian empire that became part of Romania after World War I and where Ukrainian and Yiddish were also heard daily in the streets. An only child whose parents were killed by the Nazis, he survived the Holocaust, resided briefly in Bucharest after the war, and then settled in Paris, where he lived until his suicide by drowning in 1970, at the age of forty-nine.

Although he was proficiently multilingual, knowing also some Hebrew and enough English and Russian to translate poetry from them, Celan chose to write his verse in his mother tongue. "There is nothing in the world," Felstiner quotes him as saying not long after his arrival in Paris, "for which a poet will give up writing, not even when he is a Jew and the language of his poems is German." Certainly his anguish, perhaps rage, at writing in the language of the murderer was part of what ultimately drove him to a style in which the very syntax and morphology of ordinary speech were savagely torn apart and refitted. As

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he told an audience in Bremen in 1958, German remained for him "not lost . . . in spite of everything" but rather a language that, in order for him to write in it,

> had to pass through its own answerlessness, pass through frightful muting, pass through the thousand darknesses of death-bringing speech. It passed through and gave back no words for that which happened; yet it passed through this happening. Passed through and could come to light again, "enriched" by all this.

True, many of Celan's more lyrical early poems, including his much anthologized *Todesfuge* or "Death Fugue" (which was said to have occasioned Theodor Adorno's famous and foolish remark that "to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric"), are not enormously difficult. Here, for example, is "Aspen Tree," written in 1945 (the translations throughout are by Felstiner, unless otherwise noted):

> Aspen tree, your leaves glance
> white into the dark.
> My mother's hair never turned
> white.
> Dandelion, so green is the
> Ukraine.
> My fair-haired mother did not
> come home.
> Rain cloud, do you linger over
> the well?
> My soft-voiced mother wept
> for everyone.
> Rounded star, you coil the
> golden loop.
> My mother's heart was cut by
> lead.
> Oaken door, who hove you off
> your hinge?
> My gentle mother cannot
> return.

In reading this poem it does help to know, as Felstiner tells us, first, that it is modeled on a genre of Romanian folk song in which natural and physical objects are summoned as witnesses to human grief; and second, that Celan's mother was shot to death in a German labor camp in the Ukraine. Still, such extra-textual information is not crucial. That is no longer the case, however, with a poem like "Epitaph For François," written in 1953:

> Both doors of the world
> stand open:
> opened by you
> in the twinight.
> We hear them beating and
> beating
> and bear it uncertainly,
> and bear the green into
> your Ever.

These lines have a foreboding power, but we can hardly understand them unless we are aware, as Felstiner but not the poet makes us aware, that François was Celan's first child, who died shortly after birth. (Felstiner also points out that Celan had come across the images of the "gates of day and night" while reading the ancient Greek philosopher Parmenides, and that he had encountered a hasidic saying in the writings of Martin Buber about "man passing through two doors between this world and the next.")

By 1957 we have poems like "Flower":

> The stone.
> The stone in the air, which I
> followed.
> Your eye, as blind as the stone.
>
> We were
> hands,
> we scooped the darkness empty,
> we found
> the word that ascended summer:
> Flower.
>
> Flower—a blindman's word.
> Your eye and my eye:
> they look
> after water.
>
> Growth.
> Heartwall by heartwall
> adds on petals.
>
> One more word like this, and
> the hammers
> will be swinging free.

Felstiner's commentary on this poem observes, among other things,

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that Celan's son Eric "was twenty months old in early spring of 1957 when he spoke his first word, *fleur* ('flower')"; that the "sudden turn, from the title 'Flower' to 'stone' in the first line, hardens the medium for speech and vision [and] also links 'The stone in the air' to *Deathfugue*'s 'grave in the air'"; that "Celan's 'you' may be his mother witnessing the first word of her grandchild"; that "the 'we' then speaks for [Celan's] wife and him"; that the German verb *schoepften*, scooped, "suggests delivering a birth" and also "yields *Schoepfung* ('creation')"; that as for "darkness," Celan "revised *Dunkelheit* to *Finsternis*, bringing [Martin Luther's translation of] Genesis within earshot, scooping darkness for the advent of speech"; that "visionary tradition told [Celan] that 'Flower—a blindman's word' was a speaking blindness, like that of Tiresias, Oedipus, and the vigilant dead"; and so forth. And even once we know all this, much escapes us.

FINALLY, THERE is the almost impenetrable decade of the 1960's, when Celan's verse tended toward an ever darkening obscurity in which the mold of language was more and more violently shattered. Passing over these last years quickly, Felstiner makes little attempt to explicate their poems, many short and untitled like the following two (in the translations of Katharine Washburn and Margret Guillemin):

> Hour of the barge,
> the half-transformed bear the load
> of one of the worlds,
>
> cast from the throne, he turned inwards,
> speaks among brows on the shore:
> rid of death, rid
> of God.

And:

> To climb from marshy soil
> into non-image
> is blood
> in the gun-barrel hope,
> the target is within like impatience come of age.
>
> Country air, rue Tournefort.

One late poem that Felstiner does dwell on at length, commenting on its use of medieval German and biblical Hebrew, reads:

> You be like you, ever.
> *Ryse up Ierosalem and*
> *rowse thyselfe*
>
> The very one who slashed the bond unto you,
> *and becum*
> *yllumyned*
>
> knotted it new, in myndignesse,
>
> spills of mire I swallowed,
> inside the tower,
> speech, dark-selvedge,
> *kumi*
> *ori.*

Since by this time Celan was mentally unwell and suffering from bouts of clinical depression and paranoia, it is tempting to view his late verse as presenting a psychological rather than a literary problem. Yet apart from the philistinism of attributing to aberrancy whatever we fail to understand, these last poems do not reflect a fundamental change of direction. They are the product of an aesthetic assumption present in Celan's work from the beginning—and not only in Celan but in a number of prominent modern poets, starting with Rimbaud and Mallarmé in late 19th-century Paris and best represented in English by the T.S. Eliot of *The Waste Land* and the Ezra Pound of the *Cantos*.

This assumption, connected with the strictly modern concept of the avant-garde, is that the grounds of our encounter with a work of literature can be shifted from the public arena we call culture, with its shared knowledge, memories, and symbols, to the private mental processes of the writer, with which it is the reader's obligation to become familiar. No longer, in such a view, are writing and reading reciprocal acts engaging each other in a common space accessible to all; writing, rather, is esoteric wisdom, and reading, a devotional commitment separating the elect from the uninitiated.

There are well-known historical factors that helped shape this view, including the Romantic religion of art, the anti-bourgeois sentiment of a European intelligentsia seeking to dissociate itself from the middle class, and the rise of movements like surrealism, by which the young Celan was influenced. And yet certainly, the torment of having lived through and survived the Holocaust strengthened and deepened what was a natural bent in him. It is as though his verse wished to tell us, even before we begin to grapple with it, that it is speaking the unspeakable.

Nor is it, I think, a coincidence that Celan's poems became more resistant and encoded as the Holocaust itself came to be more widely and more prominently treated in both literature and the media. There is in these poems a horror of being understood too easily, a horror that is undoubtedly a reaction to what *was* being understood too easily. Often, Felstiner shows, as Celan revised, each draft became not clearer, as generally happens with works in progress, but more opaque, key connections or clarifications being deleted to create deliberate lacunae of meaning. Like bridges blown up against an advancing army, these served to protect the inwardness of his verse against frontal critical assault.

FELSTINER, WHO teaches at Stanford, approaches Celan's poems with delicacy, teasing out their tightly wound (and often highly Jewish) strands of imagery, allusion, association, and polyglot wordplay while turning on them the magnifying glass of his own dilemmas and choices as a translator. More informative about the poetry than about the man who wrote it, he leaves us knowing less than we might like

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about Celan's friends and habits, his relationships with his wife and son, and the record of his psychiatric treatment and hospitalizations. But this is surely as Celan himself would have preferred it, just as he would have been gratified by Felstiner's painstaking demonstrations that even the most seemingly obscure of his poems, if only one works one's way deeply enough into them, have their internal logic and decipherment.

Is the project worth the effort? Obviously it is for the small but dedicated groups of readers whom Celan enjoys today in many countries, and for whom his reclusive refusal to modify his voice for the sake of greater comprehensibility has made him a literary saint. But Celan did want to communicate—or at least that would seem to be the implication of his adamant and oft-quoted (though, on the face of it, rather strange) insistence that he was "absolutely not hermetic."

Celan, according to Felstiner, feared that "if his poetry was seen as magically sealed off from understanding, this would relieve his readers of responsibility." Which leaves pending the question: just how far does the responsibility of the reader have to go before it meets the responsibility of the writer?

Is Humor Necessary?

James Thurber:
His Life and Times
by Harrison Kinney
Holt. 1,238 pp. $40.00

Reviewed by
Daniel J. Silver

THE GOOD news is that today, more than three decades after his death, at least a couple of James Thurber's books can be found in the humor sections of bookstores. The bad news is that they are likely to be squeezed in among such edifying titles as *The Newt Gingrich Quiz Book* and shelves of cartoon books about cats and lawyers. The contemporary scene, it appears, simply does not lend itself to literary humor that aims as much for artfulness as to inspire laughter.

For a time, unlike our own, when popular culture intersected to some degree with aesthetic values, one can, *faute de mieux*, look back nostalgically to the 1920's and 30's, and to that era's most prestigious organ of semi-mass appeal: the *New Yorker* under the stewardship of its founding father, Harold Ross. Of all the figures associated with the early years of the magazine—E.B. White, John O'Hara, A.J. Liebling, S.J. Perelman, Dorothy Parker, Charles Addams, and Wolcott Gibbs, to name a few—none has stood up like Thurber.

Thurber is sometimes spoken of in the same breath as Mark Twain; E.B. White, his first friend on the *New Yorker*, once said he actually preferred Thurber because he lacked Twain's "annoyances." But that is to load Thurber with unnecessary expectations. If he is free of Twain's smugness and morbidity, he does not have Twain's range and encompassing intellect. Still, no one, not even Twain, is more keenly sensitive to the ridiculousness of the human condition than Thurber. When we consider the personal hell he underwent in his life, it is all the more remarkable that his art avoids the bitter, insulting irony that is standard fare among most contemporary humorists.

HARRISON KINNEY, a journalist and one-time *New Yorker* staffer, has spent several decades researching the definitive biography of Thurber. It would be churlish to say he has fallen short: the finished book, with over a thousand pages of narrative, contains enough material to sink Thurber's life story under its mass. For Kinney, the work has clearly been a labor of love; for the reader it is, certainly, labor, but labor that is also finally worthwhile. With the aid of quotations from Thurber's letters and sketches, Kinney is able to convey his subject's essential style while also surrounding him with an amiable, literate, and unobtrusive prose of his own.

Thurber was born in 1894 and raised in Columbus, Ohio. His father, though not without his own sense of dignity, had been a clerk and political hanger-on for most of his quiet life; he would prove, in part, a model for his son's most famous character—Walter Mitty, the duteous, henpecked man who escapes from stale reality through daydreams of glory. As for Thurber's mother, she could not have been more dissimilar: a nonstop talker, *raconteuse*, and practical joker who inspired her son's madcap, antic side.

Apart from occasional flashes of wit, the young Thurber gave off lit-

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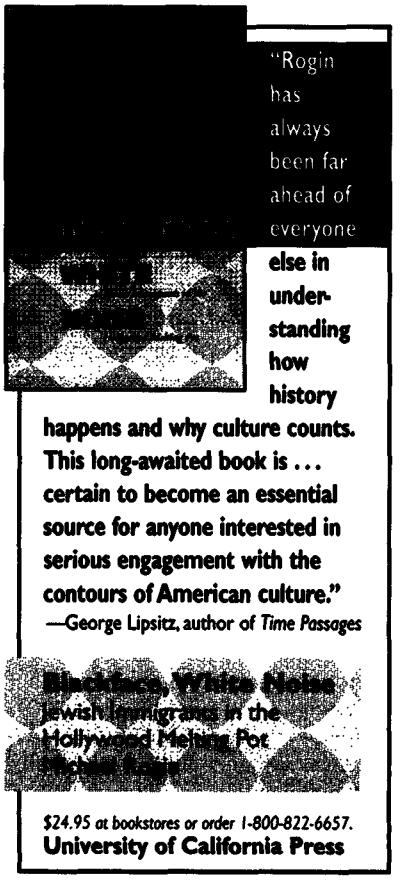
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tle hint of promise. After he lost an eye to an arrow (his brother was playing William Tell), his family and friends treated him as a premature invalid, thereby heightening his natural bent toward isolation and introversion. He entered college, incongruously at hale-and-hearty Ohio State University, as a tall, scrawny, ungainly youth with a glass eye and a haunted look—decidedly unpromising fraternity material. Yet with an unerring gift for mimicking his professors, he caught the attention of a bright BMOC, Elliott Nugent—later to become a successful actor, writer, and director—who took Thurber under his wing and encouraged him to develop his literary talent.

After college, Thurber turned first to daily journalism, bouncing around from paper to paper; but, unable or unwilling to write a lead shorter or more direct than a sentence by his beloved Henry James, he did not last long. Drifting to New York, he applied for a job at the upstart *New Yorker*, where Harold Ross hired him to be what he loosely called a "managing editor" and also indulged his development as a writer, putting him to work on "Talk of the Town" pieces and "Profiles," mainly biographical sketches of celebrities. With E.B. White, Thurber soon collaborated on the work that put them both on the map: *Is Sex Necessary?* (1929), a book-length parody of the psycho-medical sex manuals that had lately become a rage.

Thurber had by now found his métier in the short comic sketch; and he also discovered that his primitive, untutored drawings—for him, just nervous doodles—were regarded as charming and funny (except by Ross, who never "got" Thurber's drawings but was astute enough to appreciate that readers loved them). He started the series based on his family and hometown which became *My Life and Hard Times* (1933), perhaps his single funniest collection and an immediate best-seller.

In one of these tales, "The Day the Dam Broke," Thurber recalled an actual event: the day residents of his part of Columbus, the east side, skittish at flood scares (which usually threatened the west side), hysterically fell into the false belief that a dam had given way. In a panic, everyone leaves hearth and home. Thurber's senile grandfather, a former Union officer, mistaking the townspeople for troops in cowardly retreat, wants to make a last stand at the homestead. He has to be knocked out and dragged from the house:

> It was [Thurber's mother's] plan to make Memorial Hall, just two blocks away, and take refuge somewhere in the top of it. . . . But the seething throngs, shouting "Go east!," drew her along and the rest of us with her. When grandfather regained full consciousness, at Parsons Avenue, he turned upon the retreating mob like a vengeful prophet and exhorted the men to form ranks and stand off the Rebel dogs, but at length he, too, got the idea that the dam had broken and, roaring "Go east!" in his powerful voice, he caught up in one arm a small child and in the other a slight clerkish man of perhaps forty-two and we slowly began to gain on those ahead of us.

Much of Thurber is here: the exactness of phrasing and deliberate pace; the quietly elegant diction, neither fussy nor folksy; and the deadpan manner, with its nonchalantly smuggled-in masterstroke of the "slight clerkish man of perhaps forty-two"—reminding us of the grandfather's senile ignorance of the differences between adults and children, yet also paying a tribute of awe to a still formidable old man.

THURBER'S BEST-KNOWN theme was the war between the sexes, for which he drew from some of his own trying experiences. His first marriage, to a strapping college beauty, was all wrong; the couple found themselves incompatible in everything but a shared love of dogs. Meanwhile, he pined hopelessly for a more sophisticated woman friend who probably loved but could not find it in herself to marry him.

In private, Thurber would rail against women, expatiating on the notion that America was essentially a matriarchy in which men were deceived into believing they were in charge. (A pasteurized version of this is a *leitmotif* of his work.) In his worst periods of depression, and in his cups, he would fall into ugly accusations, then contritely beg the mercy of those he had offended. Although for most of his life this behavior was tolerated—it was "just Jim being Jim"—later, as he grew increasingly bitter, former friends and sycophants alike would avoid him.

In the 40's, Thurber was struck with an acute degenerative affliction of his remaining eye. The result was a progressive blindness that kept him almost completely from drawing. He could still write, thanks to his powerful memory and to the unstinting help of his second wife, Helen. After dictating his first drafts he would memorize them, making revisions in his head.

As he aged, however, Thurber also became less indulgent of his whimsical side and took on more serious causes, becoming something of a public curmudgeon on the subject of grammar and literacy and, his favorite, free speech. In the 1950's he publicly defended the First Amendment rights of various left-wing writers, although not, it should be noted, out of sympathy for their cause. Indeed, already in the 1930's, in a foretaste of Tom Wolfe's attack on "radical chic" in the late 60's, Thurber had skewered the pretenses of various literary champions of the "proletarian novel," well-off writers like Lillian Hellman and Dorothy Parker who mixed with swells at "21" and then pontificated about the impending "workers' paradise."

His new, downbeat mood did not sit well with *New Yorker* editors,

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especially after William Shawn took over the magazine following Ross's death in 1951. More of his pieces began to be rejected, and the ones that were accepted were given an editorial going-over Thurber found humiliating. He also came to think he had been financially exploited by the magazine (Kinney suggests he was probably right). A chance to settle scores came with a project to write a personal history of the *New Yorker*, which he titled *The Years with Ross* (1959). The book, a mainly affectionate portrait, did very well, but it also widened the rift with the magazine and his old friends there.

Thurber's last few years are mainly best forgotten. For most of his life, he had warded off his own ever-threatening despair through an extraordinarily buoyant and resourceful imagination. As he became acutely ill with an undiagnosed tumor, however, his bitter rants lapsed into full-scale incoherence, until he died in 1961. We are left—at least those of us who still have a taste for it—with a treasured legacy of subtle laughter, which this biography goes far to evoke.

Cleopatra's Nose

Not Out of Africa:
How Afrocentrism Became
An Excuse to Teach Myth
as History
by Mary Lefkowitz
Basic Books. 222 pp. $24.00

Reviewed by
Chester E. Finn, Jr.

Mary Lefkowitz, a distinguished classicist at Wellesley College, has set out to debunk the myths of Afrocentrism, particularly those that have arisen in the realm of her own special expertise: the civilization of ancient Greece. Her book is valuable not just for the lucid erudition she brings to the task of exposing falsehoods and nonsense, but also for her use of the contretemps over Afrocentric history to illuminate problems in contemporary education—problems that extend far beyond the debate over the color of Cleopatra's nose.

A word first about those problems. Although Afrocentrism has its roots in higher education, its tendrils extend into what is taught in the public schools, particularly in big cities. Perhaps its first major appearance was in the late 1980's in Portland, Oregon, where the local school district, in response to a court desegregation order, engaged a "multicultural coordinator" who, in turn, retained the Afrocentrist educator Asa Hilliard of Georgia State University as an adviser who, in turn, hired consultants to write what became known as the *Portland Baseline Essays*.

These tracts, which trace much of human knowledge—the development of art, science, philosophy, etc.—to a black civilization that once inhabited ancient Egypt, have become the bible of Afrocentric education in the United States. Especially in cities with large black enrollments in their schools, curricula based on the *Portland Baseline Essays* are widely in use, the more so where school officials have opted for esteem-building programs in place of those that impart basic skills.

The politics of big-city education being what they are, few can easily resist this trend. The Afrocentric curriculum conforms, after all, to the ideological proclivities of teacher-college faculties and influential professional groups such as the National Council for Social Studies and the National Association of Black School Educators. Afrocentrism, moreover, has become the specialty of platoons of academics, mostly found in university departments of ethnic or African-American studies, whose own careers hinge on the acceptance and spread of their curricular emphases and teaching methods in primary and secondary schools. (Few such academics have actually done original research or published their findings in scholarly journals; most, rather, are simply popularizers and evangelists of the creed.)

The Afrocentric curricular project has two objectives. The first is to highlight the contribution blacks have made to civilization, particularly to our own. This enterprise, perfectly legitimate up to a point—figures like Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois formerly did not receive the attention they deserved in school textbooks—first got under way two decades ago. Today, if anything, the rectification campaign has gone overboard in the opposite direction, at the expense of historical balance and truth.

The second and more pernicious mission of the Afrocentrists is to create a past that never existed—a past in which Africa was at the center of world history. This is done primarily by tracing key elements of Western civilization and contemporary culture to African roots, and crucially to ancient Egypt. If it can be demonstrated that major strands in Western philosophy, literature, and mathematics originated in the land of the pharaohs, and if it can also be shown that ancient Egypt was an "African" civilization in more than the narrowly geographic sense, then large parts of Western learning and culture can be claimed and celebrated as African. Many a forest has fallen in service to this cause, and many an American student is now being taught that Socrates was black and other such non-facts.

In *Not Out of Africa*, Lefkowitz explores and explodes the predominant Afrocentric legends, like the "myth of African origins" which holds that not only Socrates but other key figures in ancient Greece, and even the populations of entire city-states, were of African descent.

One propagator of this particular

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myth is the Senegalese writer Cheikh Anta Diop, who has argued that Athens, the cradle of Western civilization, "was founded by a colony of Black Egyptians." It turns out—Lefkowitz is superb at lighting the dim corridors in which falsehood is transmuted into fact—that Diop bases his assertion on the writings of a 1st-century Sicilian named Diodorus, who was simply recounting what Egyptian priests had told *him*. Diodorus did not say he believed their tale, nor, as we learn from Lefkowitz, has anyone else, until today's Afrocentric historians. No doubt, like them, the Egyptians of Diodorus's day had their own reasons for magnifying the reach and influence of their civilization, but that does not mean their boasts were true.

Lefkowitz disposes in similar fashion of the Afrocentric assertion that Greek philosophy, among the most valuable legacies of the ancient world, was "stolen" from Egypt. Here she leads us through a tale spanning several centuries and featuring unexpected protagonists like Mozart; various Freemasons; Marcus Garvey, who led a back-to-Africa movement among American blacks in the 1920's; and, in the 1950's, an obscure professor from Arkansas. As with the myth of African origins, she patiently shows where this notion came from, presents the evidence on which it is based, subjects that evidence to critical scrutiny, and shows the claim to be false or, at best, unsubstantiated by the weight of facts and analysis. And so it goes with the other major myths as well.

AMONG ACADEMIC disciplines, history, as Lefkowitz notes, may be the one that is farthest off course today. But the phenomenon she has pinpointed has spread widely, and is destructive everywhere it crops up, turning arguments over evidence into fights about motive, undermining academic freedom, and transforming the quest for truth into claims rooted in the celebration of ethnic diversity.

All the more reason, then, to be grateful for what she has done here, not merely by blowing the whistle on charlatans and frauds and pseudoscience but also by declaring her faith in the very existence of historical truth and by demonstrating the painstaking labors through which, and only through which, it is ascertained. As she writes in the powerful conclusion of her work:

> Students of the modern world may think it is a matter of indifference whether or not Aristotle stole his philosophy from Egypt. They may believe that even if the story is not true, it can be used to serve a positive purpose. But the question, and many others like it, should be a matter of serious concern to everyone, because if you assert that he did steal his philosophy, you are prepared to ignore or to conceal a substantial body of historical evidence that proves the contrary. Once you start doing that, you can have no scientific or even social-scientific discourse, nor can you have a community, or a university.

Or, one might add, a school to which you can, in conscience, entrust your child.

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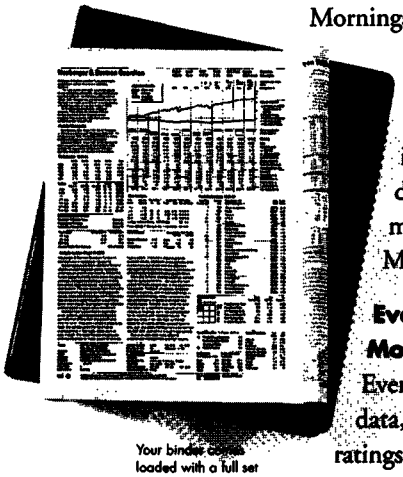

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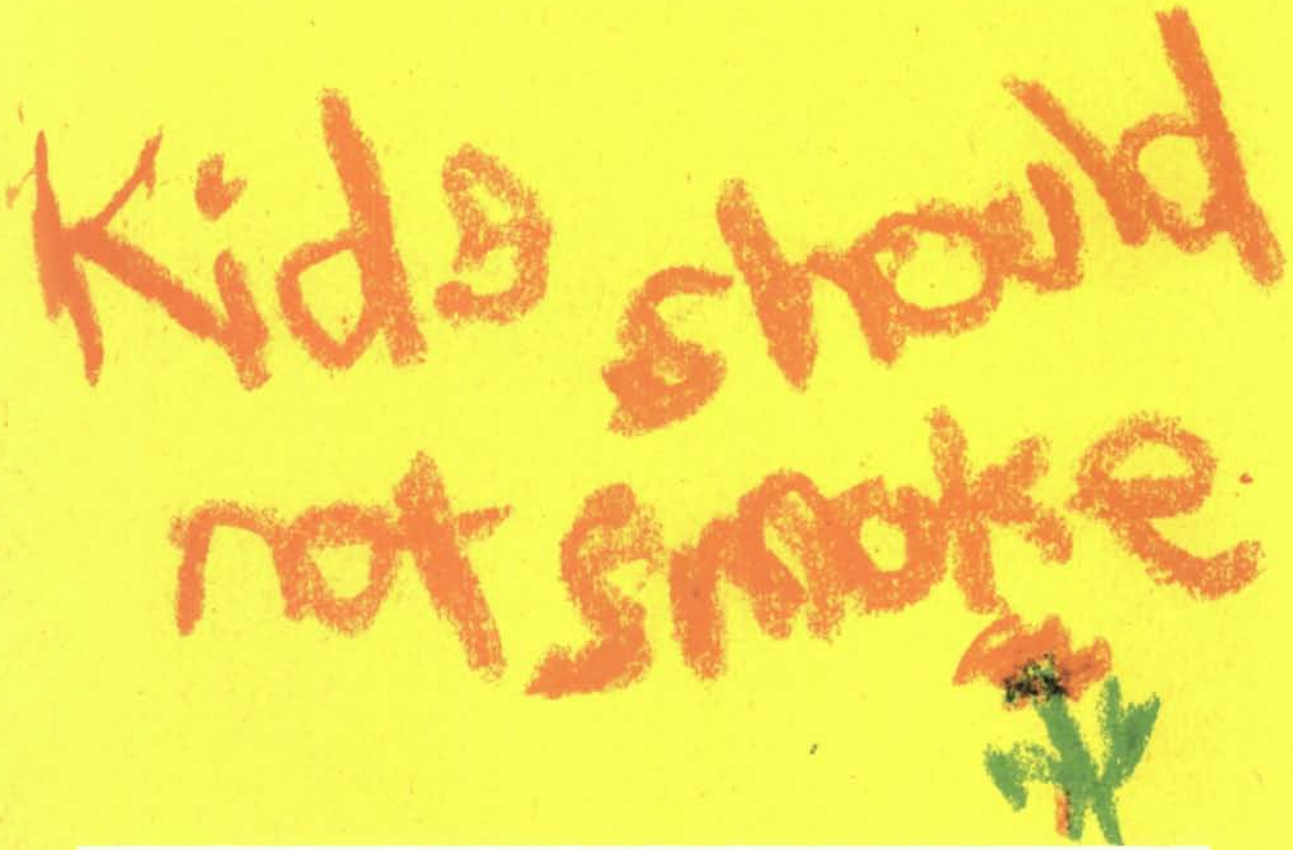

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Action Against Access.

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